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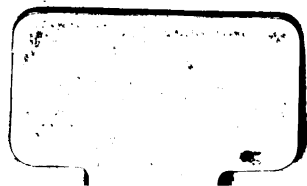
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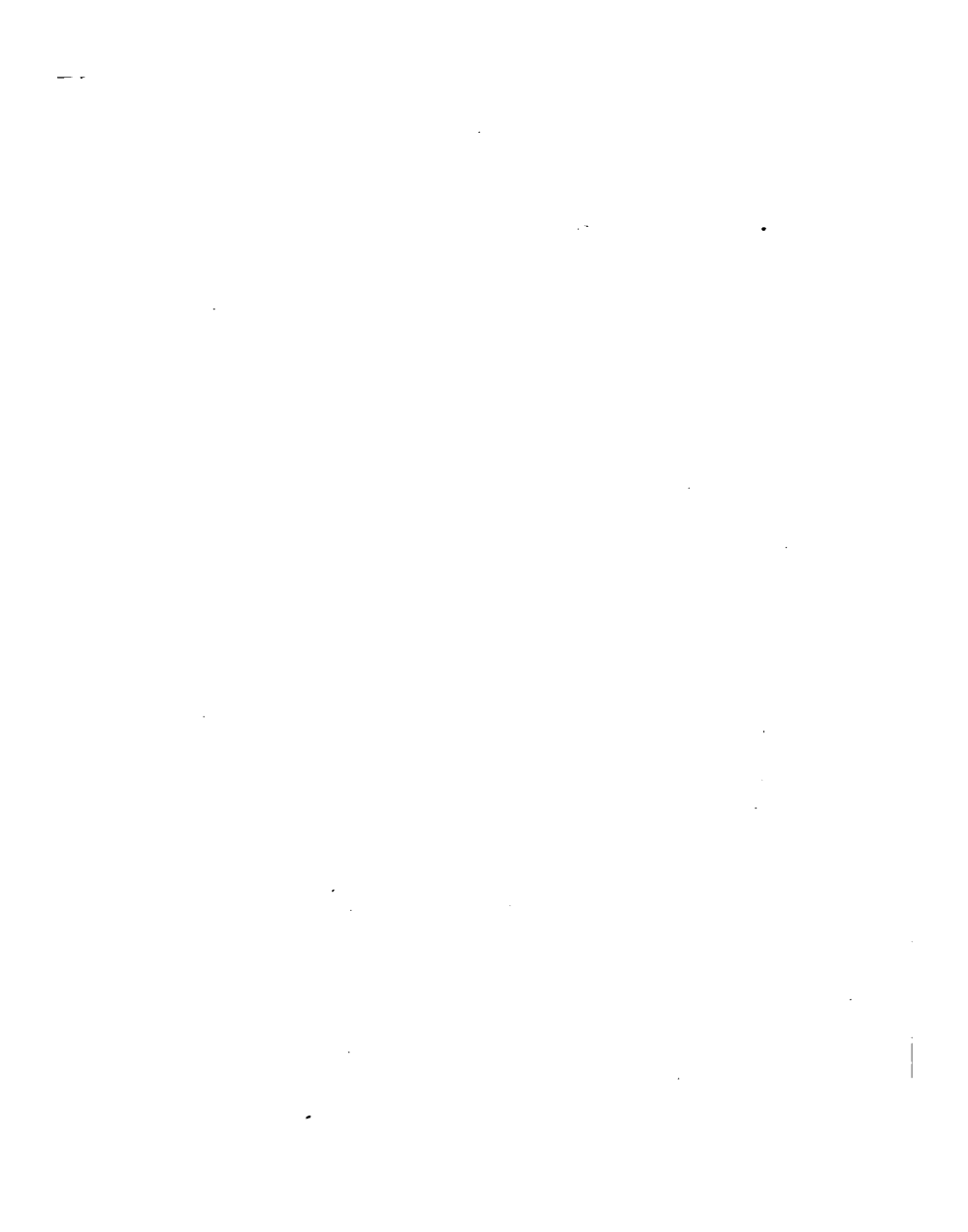
BRAVE  
NELLY

OR  
WEAK HANDS  
AND A  
WILLING HEART











NELLY SEEKING HER FATHER.

BRAVE NELLY;  
OR,  
WEAK HANDS AND A WILLING HEART.

By M. E. B.,

AUTHOR OF

'CLEMENT'S TRIAL AND VICTORY,' 'LITTLE LISETTE,' 'ADVENTURES OF KWEI,' ETC.

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'WE are little children weak,  
Nor born in any high estate ;  
What can we do for Jesus' sake,  
Who is so high and good and great ?

'With smiles of peace and looks of love,  
Light in our dwellings we may make ;  
Bid kind good humour brighten there,  
And do all still for Jesus' sake.

'There's not a child so small or weak,  
But has his little cross to take ;  
His little works of love and praise  
That he may do for Jesus' sake.'

MRS. ALEXANDER.



# BRAVE NELLY.

## CHAPTER I.

### A CONTRAST.

**C**OME, come, you must be off, or you will be too late for school again, children,' said Nelly to her sisters and brothers, who were playing about in the back yard; 'the bell has been ringing quite five minutes, and all the little Greens are gone.'

'Do let us stay at home this afternoon, Nell; it is so hot,' cried out Dick, the eldest boy.

'No, no; mother will be so angry if you don't go. You know how the schoolmaster scolded her last week about your being so often away. You must go directly,' answered Nelly.

So, after a little more delay, the children were

off, and Nelly took a broken chair and sat down at the door, with a penny journal to read.

The room was very dirty and untidy ; it had not been cleaned up for many days. On the table were the remains of the children's dinner ; the floor was black and greasy. Every bit of furniture was broken, and on the wall hung a few dirty, ragged clothes.

In one corner was an old cradle, with a pale-faced baby lying at each end of it. Nelly was quite in keeping with the room : her dress was dirty and ragged, and held together by pins ; her shoes were down at the heel, and there were great holes in her stockings, which hung all loose about her legs ; her hair was rough, and her face was dirty. But it was not an unpleasant face to look at ; if only it had been clean it would have been a very pleasant face, for the eyes were large and bright, and there was a very good-tempered smile about the mouth ; and if the hair had only been brushed, it would have been a pretty colour.

It *was* a very hot day, and Nelly felt lazy. All the dirt and disorder did not trouble her ; she was absorbed in her story, and quite enjoyed herself,

till one of the twins woke up and began to whimper and fret. Nelly took no notice till the whimper turned into a loud cry, which woke the other twin; who, of course, began to howl too.

Nelly laid down her paper with a sigh, and tried what rocking the cradle would do; but it had very little effect, so at last she was obliged to take the twins up and try to pacify them by carrying them about the room by turns. This was very hard for poor Nelly, for she was lame.

‘Perhaps they are hungry,’ she thought at last; and she went to the shelf and gave them some syrup, which soon stopped their crying. So she put them back into the cradle, and very soon they were asleep again.

Then, in a listless way, Nelly began to tidy up. She washed the cups and plates, and wiped them with a very greasy cloth, with which she afterwards wiped the table. Then she got an old broom and swept all the mess off the floor into the back yard. By this time she was quite tired, so she sat down again on her seatless chair and took up her story; but she had not read long when she too fell asleep. She was aroused by a cheer-

ful voice saying, 'Nelly, Nelly!' and starting up, she saw a very neat, bright little girl standing before her, with a loaf of bread in her hand. It was a neighbour's child, Annie Green.

'Mother has sent your mother a loaf,' said the little girl; 'she has been making bread to-day, and she thought maybe you would like a loaf, I was to say.'

'Oh, thank you, Annie,' answered Nelly, looking much pleased. 'It does look delicious. Mother will be so pleased when she comes in from her work, for we have nothing at all in the house.'

'Nothing in the house!' exclaimed Annie.

'No; nothing but a few crusts,' answered Nelly.

'But you have had a good dinner?'

'Oh, yes; we had potatoes to-day.'

'Well, I must not wait now; mother wants me. I will ask her to give you a loaf whenever she makes bread,' said Annie.

'Thank you,' answered Nelly, rising from her chair, and walking a few steps with Annie. 'I wish you would come in oftener, it is so dull all by myself here.'

‘I will, if mother will let me,’ answered Annie; ‘and I will help you to nurse the babies. I am so fond of babies.’ Then she exclaimed, ‘Why, Nelly, what is the matter? You walk quite lame!’

‘I am lame,’ said Nelly, in a low voice, flushing all over.

‘Oh, I am so sorry! I never knew it before; and I have often thought what an—’ here she checked herself.

‘Thought what?’ asked Nelly, eagerly; ‘do tell me.’

‘Why, it was very unkind, and I will never say it again, now I know you are lame; but I did think you were rather lazy and dirty, you know.’

Nelly sighed; as she looked at herself, and then at the neat, clean little figure before her, she could not wonder. She *was* very dirty, and she had been very lazy all day.

‘But I have no one to teach me to be nice and good, like you have,’ she said, after a pause, with tears in her eyes. ‘Mother goes out the first thing in the morning, and I have to mind all the children, and get them off to school, and clean up, and everything; and you don’t know how tired I get,’



she added. 'My leg does hurt me so ; and the children are so tiresome !'

'Poor Nelly !' said little Annie, kindly ; 'I will ask mother if I may come and help you sometimes, but I really must go now.' Then she took Nelly's hand, and put up her face as though she were going to kiss her ; but when she saw how very dirty the face was, she drew back, and with a nod and 'good-bye,' ran off.

Nelly noticed how Annie had shrunk from kissing her ; and she turned back into the house, and began to cry bitterly with shame and mortification. There was a broken bit of looking-glass on the mantelpiece ; she went and looked at herself in it, and, for the first time in her life, she saw how very ugly and disagreeable dirt and untidiness were. Then one of the twins began to cry. Nelly took it in her lap and sat rocking it on her knee, while the tears ran down her grimy cheeks, making little white channels as they fell.

'Whyam I sodifferent to Annie Green ?' thought the poor girl to herself. 'No one ever cares how *I* look ; and *her* mother is always making her nice

new frocks, or mending up her old ones. Why, she looks as clean as any lady, and so do all the children. Oh dear ! I wish our mother liked to make us clean and nice. Mrs. Green does not go out to work ; that makes a difference, to be sure. But even when father was well, and brought home his wages regular, it was just the same ; we were just as dirty and hungry as we are now. Oh dear ! I wonder whose fault it is. Not mine ; I am lame. It is very hard that I should be lame, and father ill, and mother have to work so hard, and all the children be so tiresome ; and if father has taken to drinking, it will never get any better, never,' thought poor Nelly, as she began to cry more bitterly than ever. She went on indulging in gloomy thoughts, till her mother came in and flung herself down on a broken chair, saying :

‘ Nelly, child, I’m dreadful tired, this heat is enough to kill one ; do get me a cup of tea, while I hold Tommy.’

Nelly gave Tommy to her mother ; and as she looked at her worn face she forgot all her hard thoughts, and hurried away to get some sticks and make up a little fire to boil the kettle. In a little

while Nelly had made some weak tea, and set a few broken cups on the table.

‘Tea is ready, mother,’ she said as she took Tommy. ‘You do look tired; come and have some.’

‘Yes, I’m tired enough, and faint too, child,’ answered Mrs. Thomson wearily; ‘but there’s nothing in the house to eat, is there?’

‘Yes; Mrs. Green sent Annie with a lovely loaf. She made it herself, and she says she will send us one every time she bakes.’

‘Well, that does look nice, to be sure!’ said Mrs. Thomson, as she cut herself off a slice. ‘Where are the children, Nell? Not come in from school yet? School must have been over long ago; they know I don’t like them to play in the streets. What tiresome children they are! they never mind a word one says.’

‘I think I hear Dick’s voice,’ said Nelly, as she went to the door and looked out. ‘Yes; here they are.’

In another minute in came the children.

‘Oh my!’ cried Dick; ‘what a jolly big loaf! Where did that come from? Come, Nell, give us a slice!’

'You naughty children, to stay playing in the streets,' began their mother. 'I am very angry with you.'

But the children did not heed her scolding; they were so used to it, that they never thought of minding. And as soon as they had devoured the bread they went into the yard to play; and when they were tired, crept all unwashed into their miserable beds.

Annie Green's home was only a few doors from Nelly's. She ran straight in after leaving Nelly, and found her mother busy ironing. Mrs. Green was just as neat and bright-looking as her little daughter, and so was her cottage.

'You've been a long time gone, Annie,' she said, rather sharply. 'Come, look alive, or tea won't be ready when father comes in!'

'I could not help stopping a little to talk to poor Nelly. Do you know she is lame, mother? And the place did look so dirty, and so did the poor thing,' said Annie.

'Is she lame, poor child? I did not know that,' answered Mrs. Green. 'Was Mrs. Thomson pleased with the loaf?'

‘She was out at work, but Nelly seemed very pleased. She said they had nothing in the house but a few crusts. So I said I would bring them a loaf every time you made bread. You won’t mind, will you, mother?’

‘Mind! no, child. I’m thankful we can help our neighbours a bit sometimes.’

‘And, mother,’ went on Annie, ‘I told Nelly that, if you would let me, I would run in sometimes and help her to clean up a little. She says her leg does hurt her so; and she has to do everything, for her mother goes off to work the first thing in the morning. May I go, mother, to-morrow?’

‘I think we’ve enough to do to get through our own work, Annie, without doing other people’s,’ replied Mrs. Green. ‘I don’t see how I can spare you.’

‘Oh, I’ve often a minute or two to spare, mother,’ said Annie; ‘and I could get up an hour earlier in the morning, if that was all.’

‘Well, child, as long as you don’t neglect your work at home, I’ve nothing to say against it. There’s father.’

Annie ran out to meet her father. She had been very busy all the time she was talking to her

mother, and tea was quite ready on a nice clean cloth ; and there was a rasher of bacon before the fire cooking for father, who came in leading a rosy-cheeked child by each hand, and with two more pulling at his coat tails. When the children came out of school, if it was fine, they always went to meet their father coming from his work.

He gave his wife and Annie a kiss, and then went into the back kitchen to clean himself before sitting down to tea ; and the children also washed their hands and put on their pinafores.

When they were ready, they all took their places round the table, and Mr. Green said grace, and then they began tea. When the meal was over, Mr. Green went to work in his little bit of garden at the back. Annie put the little ones to bed, and Sarah, the next girl, washed up the tea things ; then Mrs. Green and the two girls took their sewing, and sat in the garden on a wooden seat which father had put up for them. At nine o'clock he read a chapter out of the Bible, and a short prayer, and then they all went to bed, and were up at five again the next morning, for Mr. Green had to be at his work by six.



## CHAPTER II.

### NELLY'S NEW FRIEND.

**B**Y being extra busy the next morning, Annie Green managed to get through her cleaning half-an-hour earlier than usual.

'I need not get dinner ready for half-an-hour, mother. May I run in to Nelly Thomson?' she asked.

Mrs. Green glanced round to see that nothing had been overlooked, and said: 'I suppose so, child; and here,' she added, as Annie was running out, 'perhaps they'd be glad of a cabbage. Father cut two this morning, and one's quite enough for us.'

Annie found Nelly 'dressing' the twins, as she called it. She looked very pleased to see Annie.

'I can wash this one while you do that,' said

Annie, in a business-like way. 'I've just half-an-hour to help you, Nelly.'

'How kind you are,' said Nelly; 'but I've dressed Tommy. Now I'm going to do Jimmy.'

Annie looked at Tommy with surprise. She certainly would have had no idea that he was dressed, for he looked very little less dirty than Jimmy.

'I'll get you the basin and water, then,' she said.

'Oh, this is the only basin we have,' answered Nelly, pointing to a small tin one on the table. 'There was a little water in it, and a dirty bit of flannel.'

'Why, you are washing him without any soap!' exclaimed Annie.

'We have no soap,' replied Nelly, with a blush; 'mother gave me twopence to buy some, but I have not had time to go out.' She forgot that she had spent nearly an hour reading a story before she began her work at all.

'Stop a minute,' said Annie, 'I will get you a bit of soap;' and off she ran, and returned with a large basin and a piece of soap.

'Now we'll give him a nice bath, won't we?



Will you let me wash him while you boil the cabbage, Nelly ?'

Annie washed the baby, and he seemed to enjoy the bath, for he laughed and crowed ; but he did not look much the better for it afterwards. There were no clean things to put on him, and with all her pains Annie could not make him look nice.

While Nelly was in the yard for a minute, Annie rolled up a bundle of dirty things and put them near the door. Then she got a scrubbing-brush and well washed the table, and swept up the floor. All the time she chattered to Nelly in a bright, cheery way, like a little bird. Then the clock struck.

'Dear me, I must run,' she cried ; 'I did not know I had stayed so long. Good-bye, Nelly ;' and she caught up the dirty bundle and ran home.

All the rest of the day Annie was busy enough at home ; but she thought a great deal about poor Nelly, and felt very sorry for her. And the next morning the kind-hearted little girl rose at four o'clock, and washed out the bundle of dirty things,

and hung them up in the garden to dry before breakfast; and all the while she was doing it she sang away like a little bird, and the verse she had learnt on Sunday at school kept running in her head—‘Bear ye one another’s burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.’ The teacher had told her little pupils that they would find plenty of opportunities of obeying this commandment, if only they were on the look out. And Annie had determined to try to look out, and she had found her teacher’s words quite true.

That day passed miserably enough with Nelly. She was not up in time to give the children any breakfast before they went to school, so she had to send them off with a drink of water and a dry crust in their hands. Her conscience did reproach her when she thought of her poor, weary mother getting up and going off to her work without a word from any one, and perhaps even without a morsel of food; for though Mrs. Thomson was a poor, shiftless creature, she loved her children passionately, and worked hard and would deny herself anything for them. And many and many a time, as Nelly well knew, she would go off faint

and hungry to her work, because there was not enough food to satisfy so many mouths. When the children were off, Nelly sat down and looked round her with a sigh. She had intended to clean the room, but it was such a hopeless task, she did not know where to begin; so she thought if she waited a little, perhaps Annie would come in and help her. But the morning passed, and the children came home from school, and no Annie appeared.

Perhaps she will come in the afternoon, thought Nelly, as she began to put the plates on the table for dinner. Then she went to the cupboard; but, like old Mother Hubbard's, the cupboard was bare! On hearing this, poor Dick began to cry. He was very hungry.

Then Nelly remembered that her mother had given her a shilling the night before, and told her to get something for dinner. Dick's crying had woke the twins, who began to scream too, and Nelly put her hands to her ears in distress.

'Jane,' she said to her next sister, 'do mind the twins while I run to the shop.'

'I'll go, Nell,' cried Dick.

'No, no; if I let you go you will get nothing but

toffy.' So Nelly put on her hat and went down the street to the shop at the corner, where she bought a few rashers of bacon, a loaf, and a pound of treacle.

On her way back she had to pass the Greens' cottage. The door was standing a little way open, and Nelly peeped in to see if Annie were there; but she drew back directly, for all the family were sitting round the table having dinner.

'They must be quite rich,' thought Nelly. 'Why, they were sitting just like gentlefolks, with a clean cloth and all; and the dinner smelt so good. I wonder what it was! Oh dear! I wish we were rich.'

The dinner was only potatoes; but they were well cooked, and cleanly served, so it was very nice.

'And then how beautiful the room looked! all as clean and bright as possible. Their cottage is just the same as ours, but no one would believe it. I wish I was like Annie Green; but I am lame and poor, it would be no good to try. I suppose we must always go on as we are.'

Nelly felt as though she could hardly eat any

dinner when it was cooked, it all looked so nasty and uncomfortable after the Greens'. But the children seemed to enjoy it, and she could hardly persuade them to leave a bit for their mother's tea.

'I would not be a greedy Dick for anything,' she cried indignantly. 'Why, I don't believe poor mother had any breakfast at all to-day, and you want to eat up all her dinner.'

'And I would not be a lazy Nell, and let poor mother go off without her breakfast,' retorted Dick.

Nelly flushed angrily; Dick's words were so true that they stung her, and she answered crossly, 'Hold your tongue, you rude boy.'

'I'm no more rude than you are, Miss,' he answered, making a face. 'You're a cross patch. I would not be a cross patch.'

Then the other children began to jump round her and sing, 'Cross patch, draw the latch.' Almost everything had gone wrong with Nelly that day; and now she felt quite provoked, and gave Dick a good box on his ears. The moment she had done it she was sorry, and tried to pacify

Dick, who howled loudly, though he was very little hurt. Then the twins, of course, woke up, and began to cry too, and for a few minutes the noise was deafening. At last, by giving the children a penny to spend in sweets, Nelly induced them to go off to school. Then she turned to the twins and tried to pacify them. Jimmy soon fell asleep again after he had a little sop, but Tommy was very fretful, and Nelly had to carry him about or hush him on her knee. She was very fond of little Tommy, though he was such a trouble to her, and she could not bear to see him so miserable as he looked now. The poor little fellow could not be comforted, but kept on fret, fret, fret, all the afternoon, till his mother came in; and then very soon he fell asleep in her fond arms.

‘The place does look wretched, to be sure!’ she said, glancing round. ‘It turns one against one’s food to eat it off such a dirty table. It’s more fit for a pig than a human being.’ Mrs. Thomson had seen better days.

‘I’ve had to nurse Tommy all the afternoon, and I’m sure I’m tired enough, mother,’ answered

Nelly, as she made the tea, and set down the bit of bacon she had saved before the fire.

At the sight and smell of the bacon Mrs. Thomson cheered up, and when she had finished tea she had quite recovered her good temper.

‘I daresay you are tired, poor Nell,’ she said; ‘and so am I. I suppose it’s our fate to be always tired; but yesterday the place looked so different when I came in, I hoped you were going to turn over a new leaf.’

‘Annie Green came in and helped me yesterday,’ answered Nelly. ‘I thought she would come to-day, but she did not.’

‘Like enough she won’t come again, child. No doubt she turns up her nose at such a poor place as ours. Why, theirs is a palace compared to it.’

‘She did not say anything of the sort, mother; and she seemed very kind, and washed Tommy so nicely, and all.’

‘I know what it is when people get down in the world, Nelly. Other folks don’t care to have much to do with them.’

But Nelly would stand up for her new friend. She had really been doubting Annie a little in her

own heart before, and perhaps that made her all the more anxious to defend her.

The next day proved that Nelly was quite in the right, for, very soon after the children had gone to school, in came little Annie Green, with a very smiling face, and a heap of clean clothes in her arms. 'Look, Nelly!' she cried; 'I have washed all these things for you, and ironed them, and all myself.'

'What things, Annie?' asked Nelly, looking puzzled.

'Why, a bundle of things I took away with me the other day. I found them lying on the floor when you were in the garden. Did not you miss them, Nelly?'

'I never thought you'd taken them; but I did wonder what had become of all the things. Oh, Annie, you are good and kind; I wish I could do something for you.'

'I daresay you will, some day; but now I want you to let me wash the twins and put on their clean things, while you clean the house. I've done all my work at home, and I've plenty of time to spare this morning; but wait a minute.' And off



the little girl ran, and returned with a wooden tub, a scrubbing-brush, and a bit of soap. 'Mother says you may keep this old tub and brush, if you like,' she said, 'if you will try to keep the place a little cleaner.' Then she sat down in her business-like way to attend to the babies; and Nelly, in a very awkward fashion, began to scrub the floor. Every now and then she stopped and sighed, and worked altogether in a lazy sort of way; but Annie was much too busy to notice this. She was quite intent on her work, and, without minding their crying one bit, for almost the first time in their lives she gave the twins a thorough washing, and dressed them in quite clean things. Annie and her mother had spent the whole evening mending the things, and Mrs. Green had added several of her own baby's left-off clothes.

'Really they do look like little beauties now,' cried Annie, when she had finished her task. 'Do come and look at them, Nelly. Why, your mother will hardly know them. Which do you think is the prettiest?'

'Oh, Tommy!' said Nelly, admiringly. 'You

*have* made them look nice, Annie. I wish I could keep them always like that.'

'So you could, easily enough; only you must never get behind with your work, you know,' replied Annie, repeating one of her mother's maxims. 'Now I'll make them some sop, and they will soon go off to sleep again, little dears. Will you hold them while I make the sop?'

'Oh! I am too dirty to touch them,' said Nelly, blushing. 'I will make the food.'

When the babies had been fed, Annie put Jimmy back into the cradle, and sang Tommy, who was the restless one, to sleep in her arms.

Annie had a pretty voice, and her singing sounded very sweet. Nelly stopped in her scrubbing to listen, and these were the words Annie sang:—

'I heard the voice of Jesus say,  
Come unto me and rest;  
Lay down, thou weary one, lay down  
Thy head upon my breast.

'I came to Jesus as I was,  
Weary and worn and sad;  
I found in Him a resting-place,  
And He has made me glad.'

‘What a pretty hymn,’ said Nelly, softly; ‘do sing it again, Annie.’

So Annie sang it all through again. As Nelly listened, she felt how glad she would often be to find some resting-place where she could lay down her poor, weary head, and her tears fell very fast. She did not want Annie to see that she was crying, so she scrubbed away much harder than she had done before.

‘That is the hymn I have to say next Sunday at school,’ said Annie, presently; ‘is not it pretty?’

‘Yes,’ sobbed Nelly. ‘Do you know many hymns?’

‘Oh, yes; lots. I have to learn one every week, now I’m a big girl. What Sunday school do you go to, Nelly?’

‘I don’t go to any,’ answered Nelly.

‘Oh dear, what a pity. I am so fond of teacher and of Sunday school. Would not you like to go, Nelly?’ said Annie.

‘I don’t know. What is it like?’

‘Oh, it is so nice! We all sit round teacher and say hymns and verses, and then she reads to us

and talks to us; and she is so kind. You go to church, of course?’

‘No, I don’t. Church is too far off for me to walk to. I did go once, and I liked it very much. Do you go to church?’

‘Oh, yes; we all go every Sunday morning. Of course your father and mother go?’

‘No, they don’t,’ answered Nelly. ‘They say church is only for gentlefolks.’

‘Oh, then, perhaps they go to chapel?’ asked Annie.

‘Chapel; what is that? No, they never go anywhere of that sort. They lie in bed mostly on Sunday morning—at least father does.’

‘And what do you do?’ asked Annie, in amazement; ‘if you don’t go to church, and don’t go to school, I can’t think how you do spend Sunday.’

‘Why, I spend it just the same as other days, except that we generally have a better dinner. At least we did when father was at home; we can’t afford it now.’

‘Where is your father, Nelly?’ asked Annie.

‘He’s in the hospital,’ answered Nelly, begin-

ning to cry. 'He fell off a scaffold soon after the twins were born, and he broke his ribs and hurt himself dreadful, and he has been in the hospital ever since.'

'Do you ever see him?'

'Oh, yes; mother goes every week. I cannot go because of my leg. I wish I could. Mother says he looked dreadful last time. She does not think he will ever get better.'

'If he is gone to the hospital, I think he is sure to get well,' said Annie, consolingly. 'My father went there once when he was dreadfully bad, and he came home quite well. Mother often took me to see him then, and it was such a nice place! Would not you like to go and see your father, Nelly?'

'Yes, that I should; but I am too lame to get about much, and besides, mother has to pay for her omnibus every time she goes.'

And then Nelly began to tell Annie all about her father.

'He is so clever, you can't think,' said she, proudly. 'He is fond of reading. He taught me to read, and I do miss him so. He used sometimes

to read to us out loud of an evening; but that was a long time ago, when we were better off.'

'Yes, you must have been better off once, for mother said your father used to earn better wages than ours does. I suppose it's since he's been away you have got so poor.'

'We were poor before that,' answered Nelly.

And for some time she did not speak again; but it was so pleasant to have some one to listen to all her troubles, and to sympathize with her, that her silence did not last very long.

'Annie,' said she presently, 'does your father ever drink?'

'Drink! no,' exclaimed Annie, with horror. 'Why, he is a teetotaller, and so are we all, at least Band of Hope.'

Again Nelly was silent, and Annie saw a very sad look come over her face. She said, in an undertone, 'Does yours, Nelly?'

'Yes,' answered Nelly, bursting into tears. 'Perhaps I ought not to tell you, but it is so dreadful, you have no idea. I do love father, but I do dread his coming home again. Why, it was the drink made him fall off the scaffold.'

‘Was it?’ said Annie, her eyes wide open with horror. ‘How?’

‘Why, he came home almost mad the night before. He beat mother,’ she said, shuddering, ‘and I could not bear to see him do that, so I tried to stop him, and he turned round on me and knocked me down. And, Annie, I have never seen him since, for he was gone the next morning before I was up; and the men say he was so unsteady, and that was why he fell.’

‘And yet you love him?’ asked Annie, with amazement. ‘I think I should hate him.’

‘Oh, no, you would not; when he is sober he is so kind and good to us. He never used to do it; but some of his friends will treat him, and then he forgets everything; and he says home is so wretched, and the public-house is so bright and comfortable.’

Annie glanced round the room, which certainly was wretched. ‘Don’t you think,’ she said, ‘that if you made the place look a bit more tidy and comfortable, perhaps he would stay at home more? My father says he never sees any place so nice as home. Do try, Nelly; you might, really.’

‘No, I could not. I have tried sometimes ; but what is the good ? We have not even a decent chair to sit down on, much less anything pretty or nice. Why, you have pictures and all sorts of pretty things, Annie.’

‘Well, you might keep it cleaner, mightn’t you ?’ said Annie.

‘It does tire me so to scrub ; and I have everything to do,’ answered Nelly, with her usual sigh.

Annie did not see how she could help people who would not try to help themselves, so she went home and told her mother all about it ; and when her father came in, she told him ; so the three had a consultation together about what they should do to help their poor neighbours.

‘I’m afraid they’re not God-fearing people,’ said Mrs. Green ; ‘and depend upon it that is the bottom of it all.’

‘Yes, yes,’ said her husband ; ‘you are right there, my dear. If you can teach your little friend to love God and try to serve Him, Annie, you will indeed do a good work. All the rest will come right enough then ; and you will get a reward too, my child. There is something somewhere in the



Bible about those that turn others to righteousness shining as the stars for ever and ever.'

But I do not think it was for any hope of a reward that little Annie wanted to help her poor friend. She went to bed very thoughtful that night, and when she looked out of the window after she had said her prayers, and saw the bright stars shining so beautifully in the soft summer sky, her father's words came to her mind, and she lifted her heart to the Great Father, who reigns above the stars, and asked Him to help her in her good work.





## CHAPTER III.

### ANNIE'S FALL.

**A**NNIE was very persevering in her efforts to help Nelly; almost every day she managed to run in for half-an-hour or so, and gradually the miserable room began to look a little more like a human habitation, though it was bad enough still, with its broken bits of furniture. It rather provoked Annie to see that Nelly never would begin cleaning till she came in and helped her.

‘I really don’t believe she can see whether things are clean or dirty, mother,’ said Annie one day, almost in despair.

‘Some folks have no eye for dirt,’ replied Mrs. Green. ‘It is wonderful, to be sure. I’m almost afraid you’re only wasting your time, Annie.’

‘No, no,’ said Mr. Green; ‘don’t lose heart, my

little maid. Rome was not built in a day, you know. You keep on steady, and you'll see the result some day. When Thomson comes back from the hospital, I'll try to take him in hand and make a teetotaller of him.'

'How I wish you could, father,' said Annie, with delight; 'but I do wish we could make the place a little more decent before he does come back. You never saw anything so wretched. Every bit of furniture is broken.'

'If you could manage to bring in a chair or two, I'd see if I could mend it up a bit,' said good-natured Mr. Green, who was always ready to do anything to please his little Annie.

So the next day, when Nelly was out of the room a minute, Annie coolly walked off with a chair, which she brought back on the following morning nicely mended. It was so comfortable, that Nelly sat in it all the afternoon, reading. By degrees all the chairs were mended.

'Poor thing, she has a nice, bright face. I'm sure there is plenty of good in her, and I'll be bound she's a clever one,' said Mr. Green, one day after Nelly had been in to thank him for his kindness.

‘Yes, that she is, father,’ said Annie. ‘She can read beautifully, and she does learn so quick. Why, if I just sing a hymn over to her two or three times, she knows it by heart. I wish I could learn as quick.’

‘Why, does she go to school, then?’

‘No; she says her father taught her, and she is so fond of reading. She has read lots and lots of books. Sometimes she tells me lovely stories out of them.’

‘Does she never read her Bible, my dear?’

‘I don’t know, father. I never asked her.’

‘You should get her to go to Sunday school, Annie; she would learn something better there than foolish stories.’

‘But they are so pretty, father.’

‘Pretty enough, I daresay; but I don’t want my little maid’s head to be filled with trash, any more than I want her body to be covered with finery. It would only turn you against your work, and make you lazy. I don’t wonder poor Nelly gets on so badly, if she is given up to novel reading. Mind, Annie, you never let her lend you any of her silly books.’

Annie's face burned and she turned her head away from her father when he said this, for even then she had one of Nelly's dirty books under her pillow up-stairs. She hardly knew why she had hidden it under her pillow, but somehow she had a feeling that her father and mother would not like it, and now she felt ashamed to say she had borrowed it. She thought to herself that she would take it back the very next day, but she might as well just finish the story she had begun first.

When Annie went to bed that night, her sisters who slept in the same room were fast asleep, so she thought that would be her best opportunity of finishing her story. She hurried very carelessly over her prayers, and jumped into bed, having put the candle on a chair beside her ; then she began to read ; but when she had read on to the end of the chapter, she found there was no more of the story in that number of the journal, so she blew out her candle and soon fell asleep. In the morning she put the dirty journal in her under pocket, and went to her work as usual ; but all the time she was wondering how the story would end. As soon as her own

work was done, she went off, as usual, to help Nelly.

‘I have brought you back your book, Nelly,’ she said.

‘Is not it a nice story?’ said Nelly.

‘Yes, very. Do tell me how it ends.’

‘You had better read it yourself, Annie. Here is the end of it,’ answered Nelly, going to the shelf, and getting down two more dirty pamphlets.

‘Can’t you tell me while we work?’ said Annie.  
‘I don’t think father likes me to read stories.’

‘Why, what harm can there be in stories?’ cried Nelly. ‘It seems to me that your father does not like you to have any pleasures at all. There is a most sweetly pretty story begins in this number. Do read it, Annie. I am sure you will like it.’

‘Perhaps I may as well finish the one I have begun,’ said Annie, hesitatingly; ‘but I will not read another.’ So she put the books into her pocket.

‘And now I want you to teach me another hymn, Annie dear,’ said Nelly.

‘I wish you would come to the Sunday school,’ said Annie, who did not feel much inclined to say

hymns just then. 'You would learn all the hymns for yourself then.'

'I could not go. I have not a decent frock to go in, Annie; and besides, it's so far off. I say, Annie, I will give you all these old journals if you will give me an old hymn-book.' It was a very tempting offer; but Annie shook her head.

'No, no,' she said; 'I'll see if I can find an old hymn-book, but I won't take the journals. Father would not like it.'

'How frightened you do seem of your father,' said Nelly. 'I'm never a bit afraid of mine when he's sober.'

Annie went home with the two dirty journals in her pocket, and that night she read again in bed. She finished one story and began another; and then she got very sleepy, and she felt very disinclined to get up the next morning.

'You don't look quite well,' said her father kindly, when she came down; 'your eyes are so heavy. Is anything the matter?'

'I have got a little headache,' answered Annie.

'I've no patience with girls pretending to have headaches, like fine ladies,' said Mrs. Green. 'Eat

your breakfast and go about your work, and it will soon go.'

A few days after this, Mrs. Green said: 'It seems to me that you've burnt your candle out uncommon fast, Annie. Have you been sitting up in your room at night?'

'Oh, no,' answered Annie, turning red. She had not been sitting up, but she had been reading in bed for several nights now. She borrowed the journals from Nelly one at a time; and in return she had given her an old hymn-book, which Nelly studied quite as diligently as Annie did her stories.

So while one little girl went forward, the other went back. Nelly began to wish she knew more of the blessed Jesus she read so much about in the hymn-book, and she always sang the twins to sleep to one of the pretty hymns; and sometimes before she got into bed, she knelt down and said a feeble prayer, that God would teach her, and help her to be a better girl, though she was almost afraid to pray, she felt so naughty and miserable. She had been brought up to think that prayers and church were only for good,



respectable people. In the meantime, Annie had gone quite away down the wrong path. One fault generally leads to another. Annie had begun by disobeying her father ; and now she began to think her prayers at night quite a bother, and hurried over them, not thinking at all of the words she was saying ; and several times, when she felt very anxious to get on with a story, she forgot them altogether. Then on Sunday, for almost the first time, she did not know her hymn, and got a bad mark, and came home crying.

After her mother noticed that the candle went so fast, Annie got into bed in the dark, and then lighted her candle to read by. She had gone on doing this for nearly a fortnight, when one night she was more tired than usual, and while she was reading she fell asleep, and dropped her book on to the chair. The candle was burning low, and presently a spark fell from it, and in a minute the book was in a blaze, and set fire to the sheet. Annie woke up with a shriek, and was vainly trying to put out the flames with her hands, when her father and mother came running in to see what was the matter.

The fire was soon put out, and then, of course, they asked how it had happened.

'I don't know,' said Annie. 'I was asleep, and the fire woke me.'

'Had not you put your candle out, child? It is more than an hour since you went to bed,' asked Mrs. Green.

'I think I must have gone to sleep and forgotten it,' said Annie.

'Don't do such a thing again, then, for goodness' sake. You know I always desire you to put out your candle before you get into bed.'

While Mrs. Green was talking, her husband was looking about to see that the fire was quite put out. Suddenly he exclaimed :

'Why, what is this, Annie? Have you been reading in bed?' He held in his hand the half-burnt leaves of the penny journal.

'No,' said Annie, turning scarlet.

'No!' cried her father, in a terrible voice. 'Do not let me hear one of my children tell a lie. If you have done wrong and disobeyed me, confess it at once. Have you been reading or not?'

Annie burst into tears, and whispered, 'Just a little.'

'And pray, how long have you been in the habit of reading "just a little," miss?' said her father, still more sternly.

'Only a few times,' answered Annie, thoroughly frightened now, for she saw that her father was terribly angry.

'I will speak about this to-morrow,' he said, looking at Annie very sadly. 'I am bitterly disappointed in my child. I could not have believed it. But I must get my night's rest now, and so must your mother.'

Then they left the room ; and after a time Annie got back into bed, but there was little rest for her that night. She came down in the morning looking pale and miserable, and with a splitting headache. When she went as usual to kiss her father and mother, they both turned away and would not speak, and her father went off to his work without a word. Poor Annie with a heavy heart began to wash up. Presently she made a little remark to her mother, who answered very shortly and went out of the room. Annie did not attempt

to speak again, but she felt very unsettled. When she had finished her usual work, she was going off to see Nelly, but her mother stopped her.

‘Where are you going?’ she said.

‘To see Nelly Thomson,’ answered Annie.

‘Father says you are not to go there.’

‘But I promised Nelly I would run in this morning.’

‘I can’t help that, child,’ said Mrs. Green; ‘you must break your promise for once, unless you mean to go on disobeying your father.’

‘Is father very angry?’ asked Annie.

‘I should think so, indeed; but he did not wish me to talk to you.’

Annie took her sewing and was quite silent for the rest of the day, wondering what her father would say to her.

He came in and had his tea as usual, and then he called Annie to follow him into the garden. Annie went tremblingly, for her father’s face looked very grave. She stood by him and did not speak, but hung her head with shame, for she knew she had done very wrong.

‘Annie,’ he said, fixing his eyes upon her, ‘I

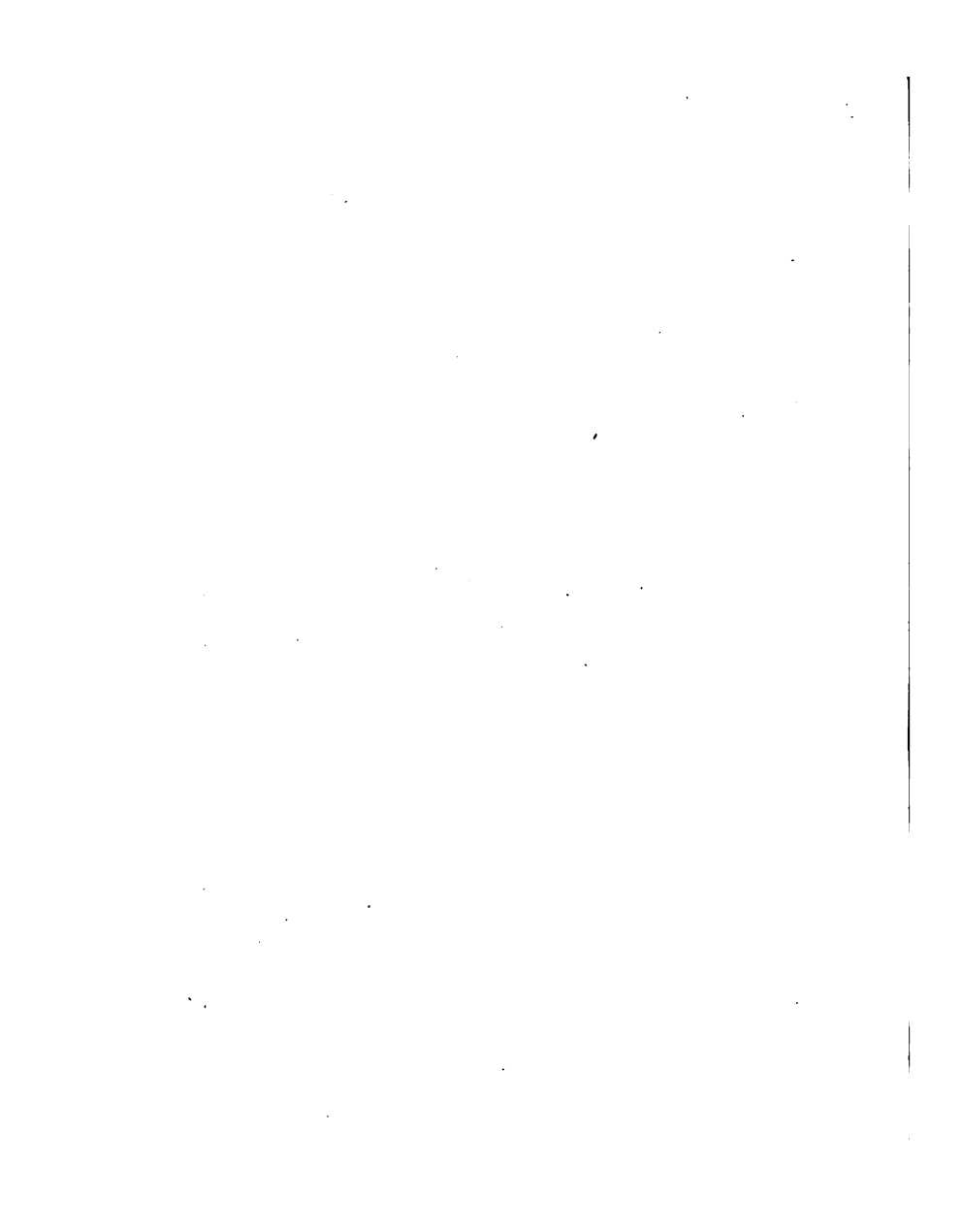
thought you were to be trusted ; that you were a good girl, and tried to serve God and please me. I find I am mistaken, and I cannot tell you how grieved and disappointed I am. But since it is so, I must treat you accordingly, and I entirely forbid you to have anything more to do with that Nelly Thomson. Mind, you are not to speak to her or go near her. You know I forbade you to borrow her books. You have deceitfully disobeyed me, and I cannot allow you to have anything more to do with a girl who has led you into such wickedness ; for remember, you have sinned against God as well as against me, you have broken His commandments, and I think now you had better go and ask Him to give you sorrow and forgiveness.'

'It was Nelly's fault for lending me the books,' said Annie.

'Nelly was not half so much to blame as you, Annie. She has never been taught what was right, but you have. You have been both deceitful and disobedient. You pretended your visits there were for her good—that you only wanted to help her.'



ANNIE GREEN REBUKED BY HER FATHER.



‘So I did, father,’ said Annie; ‘and she will think it so strange if I don’t go again.’

‘I cannot help what she thinks, Annie; I cannot have your soul endangered.’

‘I am sure there was no harm in the books,’ said Annie, sulkily.

‘I am the best judge of that, and I will be obeyed. Now you can go,’ replied her father.

Annie thought her father was very severe about such a little fault, and that Nelly was right in what she had said, that he did not like her to have any pleasures. She went in-doors and again took up her work, for all the children were gone to bed; but she did very little—her tears blinded her eyes, and her cotton kept breaking, and at last she threw down her work in despair, and laid her head on the dresser and began to sob. She tried to harden her heart, but it made her feel very miserable; and she longed to go and tell her father so, but she felt too proud.

Presently her mother came in. Annie did not want any one to see she was crying, so she hastily took up her work and turned her face away from the light. Her mother took no notice, and soon



went back into the garden. Annie thought her very hard-hearted and unkind. 'I have not disobeyed mother. She might take my part,' she thought.

She did not know that while she was indulging these hard thoughts her mother was pleading for her and begging her father to forgive her. 'The poor child looks so pale and ill, and her eyes are so red, I can't bear to see her,' Mrs. Green was saying. 'Do let me call her and tell her you will forgive her, father.'

'I cannot forgive her till she seems sorry,' he answered. 'Novel reading, next to drinking, is about as bad a habit as a woman can have; but it is not that I am so angry about, it is the deceit and the disobedience. It pains me to see her looking so miserable just as much as it does you, my dear; but it is my duty to be severe. I cannot flog her as I would a child, and she ought to suffer. It will be a lesson, I hope, she will never forget.'

When it got dark, Annie slunk off to bed and there sobbed herself to sleep, and the next morning she kept out of the way till her father was

gone to his work. He was much grieved at this sign of obstinacy, and he worked all that day with a heavy heart. It was Saturday, so he came home early; and generally, if it was fine, he took the children for a long walk, and his wife too, if she could spare the time. But this afternoon neither of them felt inclined for pleasure-taking, and he went into his garden; and there Annie saw him from the window looking so sad that her heart smote her, and suddenly it all came across her what a kind, good father he had always been, and how she knew it pained him to have to punish any of the children. She ran into the garden, but when she came up to him she could not speak, she only began to cry.

‘Well, Annie?’ he said, in a kind, encouraging voice; ‘what is it, my child?’

‘I am very sorry, father,’ sobbed Annie; ‘don’t be angry with me any more. I can’t bear it; it makes me so miserable.’

He took her face between his hands and kissed her; and she saw that his eyes were full of tears.

‘It has made me quite as miserable as it has

you, Annie,' he said; 'but I knew you would come to a better mind.'

Then he led her to the garden seat and had a long talk with her, and showed her how very naughty she had been, and Annie cried very bitterly.

'You have told *me* you are sorry. Have you told your Heavenly Father, my child?'

'No,' whispered Annie.

'Then go to your room and do so now, and ask forgiveness for Jesus' sake. You need not be afraid. He is much more kind and loving than I can be. You know there is joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth.'

So Annie did as her father had told her, and she came down feeling more happy than she had done for a long time; for no one can really be at peace whose conscience is burdened with even a little sin.

In the evening she had a pleasant walk with her father. She begged to be allowed to go and see Nelly sometimes, but he still refused that. He thought Nelly a dangerous companion for his little girl.



## CHAPTER IV.

### NELLY'S FATHER COMES HOME.

**N**ELLY THOMSON kept on expecting Annie day after day, but no Annie came ; she fancied something must be the matter, but felt too shy to go and ask.

Once Annie passed when Nelly was standing at the door. Nelly ran after her, but Annie turned very red, and said, ' Father won't let me speak to you,' and ran on.

Poor Nelly went back astonished. Mr. Green had seemed so kind to her, she could not think why he was angry now. She had never thought there was any harm in her books, and had lent them to Annie out of simple good-nature. But she now knew it was no good looking for Annie any more, so she left off expecting her,

and she fell back much into her old way of living ; but she kept on reading the hymn-book, and often longed to be different.

In a few more weeks Nelly's father came home from the hospital quite cured, and able to go to work.

Nelly remembered how she and Annie had planned to get the place nice for his return. So, though she had no one to help her, for a few days before his return she did work very hard, and cleaned up everything. Nelly was the only one at all pleased to hear that her father was coming home. Mrs. Thomson had been in a dreadful way when she thought he was going to die ; but now that he was out of danger, she thought the longer he stayed away the better. She had peace when he was away, at any rate.

But Nelly remembered how Annie used to say that perhaps, if things were cleaner and pleasanter at home, he would not want to go to the public-house ; and she determined to try what she could do to keep him at home. So when she had well cleaned the rooms, she washed herself and the twins, and set out as inviting a looking

meal as she could manage, and waited for her father.

At last he came, and she ran up and told him how glad she was to see him home again. He kissed her and the twins, and really did seem pleased to see them again. Then he sat down and looked round.

He was looking very well, and quite handsome, Nelly thought; and she was hoping that he would notice how nice and clean the house looked.

'This is a miserable hole for a Christian to have to live in,' he said presently. 'It makes me wish myself back in the hospital. There it was clean and comfortable, plenty to eat, and all for nothing.'

Nelly felt bitterly disappointed. 'I have been cleaning up all day,' she said, feeling ready to cry. 'I've made the place look as nice as I could. It's not my fault that we have not better food and grand furniture.'

'No, it's not your fault, Nelly,' answered her father; 'but I wish your mother was a better manager.'

Just then Mrs. Thomson came in.

‘So you are come?’ was all she said. ‘Shall you go to work to-morrow?’ and she cut herself a slice of bread, and sat down, all dirty as she was, to her tea.

‘Yes, I shall go to my work, sure enough; but you don’t seem over glad to see me back again, Sue?’ said her husband.

‘It’s time you *were* back, I’m sure,’ she answered. ‘I’ve been slaving myself almost to death to keep body and soul together ever since you went—and nothing but that poor lame child to mind the house and nurse the babies—it’s dreadful hard upon a poor woman.’

‘Where are the other children?’ asked her husband.

‘I don’t know, I’m sure,’ answered Mrs. Thomson. ‘Playing truant, likely enough.’

‘They go to school, then?’

‘Oh, yes; they go to school, but no thanks to you. I’m determined my children shan’t grow up dunces, whatever else they are. But Mrs. Brown, she pays for their schooling.’

Mrs. Brown was the district visitor.

‘Do you mean to spend all your wages at the

public-house, as usual ?' went on Mrs. Thomson. ' I suppose you do. Oh dear, I wish I was dead, that I do, times and times.'

Mr. Thomson sat for some time looking very moody and discontented. There certainly was nothing inviting at home. At last he took up his hat and went out. He did not return till midnight, and then he was quite stupid with drink.

Mrs. Thomson was vexed that she had thus almost driven her husband out, and that made her very cross, and she scolded all the children, and they quarrelled with each other. .

Poor Nelly sat and cried nearly all the evening. She felt quite in despair ; it seemed to her as though things never could get any better, and it was no use trying. Annie had forsaken her, and her father was gone to the public-house, and no one cared whether they were happy or miserable. Then the sweet hymn came into her head—

' I heard the voice of Jesus say,  
Come unto me and rest.'

Nelly thought there never would be any rest for her in this world ; but a little faint hope had



sprung up in her heart, that perhaps, after all this worry and toil was over, she might find rest with the Lord in heaven; even that little spark of hope was very precious to the poor forlorn child. And she sent up a feeble prayer to the Saviour she had begun to love. 'O Jesus! help me, and teach me how to help father.'

The next day her father went back to his work, came home and had tea with his family, and then took his cap and went out. It was quite dark, for the short November days had begun; but Nelly followed him. He walked so fast that she had much difficulty in overtaking him, and was quite out of breath when she did so. She could not speak, she could only catch hold of his coat.

He stopped and looked at her in surprise.

'Why, Nelly, child, what is the matter?'

'Oh, father; please, please don't go to the public-house to-night,' she gasped.

'Why don't you want me to go, Nelly? It's miserable enough at home. I'm sure you need not begrudge me a little warmth and comfort after I've been hard at work all day.' He very seldom spoke roughly to Nelly, who was his favourite child.

‘Father, if you’ll only come home regular of an evening, and bring home your wages, I’ll make home quite nice and comfortable—indeed I will,’ pleaded Nelly.

‘Make home comfortable first, and then ask me to stay there,’ said her father.

‘But I can’t if you spend all your wages at the public-house. Oh, father, I do so want things to be different! Do help me to try.’

‘I only wish things were different, Nelly; but it’s no good standing here in the cold. Run home; there’s a good girl.’

‘Won’t you come with me, father?’ pleaded Nelly.

‘I’ll just go in and smoke a pipe, and then I’ll be back.’

Nelly hesitated, then she took courage and said: ‘And you won’t take too much, will you, father?’

‘No, no; don’t trouble your little head. Good night.’ Nelly saw her father turn into the next public-house. As the door opened it did look very bright and cheerful inside, and she could hardly wonder that he would rather spend his evening there than in his dirty, miserable home, where his

wife was always scolding, and the children cried and quarrelled. She went home very slowly and sorrowfully. On her way she passed the Greens' house. The blind was drawn up, and for some time Nelly stood looking in. It was a picture of comfort, and filled the poor girl's heart with envy. Mr. Green was sitting beside the lamp, reading aloud; on the other side of the fire was his wife, sewing; and Annie and her sisters were at the table, also sewing. Everything around looked spotlessly clean and neat, a bright fire was burning on the hearth, and a cat was contentedly asleep before it. Presently Mrs. Green rose, and Nelly, with a start, limped off. When she reached home, she found her mother without any fire, and no light but a candle stuck in a bottle; the twins were both crying, and the children upstairs were quarrelling for the miserable rags they called bed-clothes. Nelly took Tommy, and soon hushed him off to sleep, and then persuaded her mother, who looked worn out, to go to bed.

'I will sit up for father,' said Nelly.

'You need not trouble yourself to do that,' answered Mrs. Thomson. 'Leave the door on the

latch and come to bed too; we've nothing worth stealing, and you look tired enough, I'm sure.'

'I'd rather sit up for a little while, mother.'

'Have your own way, then; good night,' said her mother, and very wearily she went up-stairs.

Nelly wanted to sit up to see if her father would keep his word about not taking too much. She made the room as tidy as she could, and then lighted a little fire, and got her hymn-book and sat down to read.

She tried to learn a hymn; but she was very sleepy, and soon her head began to nod over her book. She stretched herself, and rubbed her eyes, but it was no good; in a few minutes she was fast asleep in her chair.

At last she woke with a start. The fire had burnt quite out, the candle was flaring, and a church clock was striking eleven. For a minute Nelly could not remember what she had been doing, but it soon came back to her.

'Eleven o'clock, and father not come home!' she said to herself, as she fumbled about to find a fresh candle. She lighted it, and then sat down again to wait. She was too tired to attempt to

read, and it was very cold. Soon the clock chimed a quarter past eleven.

‘I must go after father, or he will come home tipsy,’ thought Nelly. ‘I must stop him if I can.’ And the brave little girl took down her mother’s old shawl, and wrapped it round her head and shoulders and went out.

It was a raw, cold night, and the rain was falling heavily, but Nelly was not to be daunted. Something seemed to force her on. She picked her way through the sloppy streets; but long before she reached the place where she had left her father, her feet were sopping wet; but she did not know it, and she did not feel the cold.

At last she reached the public-house where she had seen him go in. The gaslight flared out into the street over the window-blinds; but she was not tall enough to see in; and all of a sudden her courage failed her, and she was afraid to open the door, for inside she could hear the sound of loud laughter and coarse songs, and every now and then angry voices. She could not help fancying one of them was her father’s.

She longed to rush in and drag him out of the

evil place, but she dared not, and she stood shivering outside in the rain and cold. Several people went in and out—rough-looking men and low women, some of them, alas! with little babies in their arms. One of them stopped and looked at Nelly with kind, pitying eyes.

‘Go home, my dear,’ she said; ‘you are too young for this.’

‘I want father,’ said Nelly.

‘I wouldn’t dare face *my* father,’ answered the young woman. ‘I go here to try to forget; but you must go home and be a good girl, if you have a home;’ and the poor creature disappeared through the swinging doors.

Nelly peeped in after her, and saw her father, with a very excited face, standing among a number of angry-looking men, and talking very loud. She tried to beckon him, but he did not see her; and the door swung to, and she was shut out again alone in the darkness.

After a long, long time, a very different-looking man to any of the others came up and laid his hand on the door. He wore a long black cloak. Before going in he stopped, and said to

Nelly, 'What are you doing here, my poor child?'

There was something so kind in his face that Nelly felt he might help her, and said quickly :

'Oh, sir! do please fetch father; I've been waiting for him here such a long time, and I'm afraid to go in.'

'Is he in there, my dear?' asked the gentleman very kindly.

'Yes; and I'm afraid he's had a great deal too much already. I came to fetch him home.'

'Bless you, my child,' said the gentleman, putting his hand on her head; 'tell me what your father is like, and I will soon bring him out. I came to fetch some one too.'

Nelly described her father as well as she could, and the kind man went in. His words comforted her wonderfully, and she felt as though she had found a new friend.

In a few minutes out came the kind stranger, leading her father by the arm.

'There is your little girl,' he said; 'she has been waiting for you a long time in the cold.'

'Why, Nelly, Nelly!' laughed her father; 'so you

came to fetch me, did you ? Come inside, and I'll treat you to a glass of something hot.' His voice was thick, and he laughed foolishly.

'No ; never, never !' cried Nelly, with horror.

'Amen,' said her friend.

He went home with them, holding Nelly's hand fast in his on one side, and her father's arm on the other, for Thomson was too unsteady to walk alone. On the way, the stranger asked Nelly many questions, and by degrees she opened her heart to him, and told him all her troubles, and how she longed to be better.

'Don't give up hope, my child,' he said ; 'you will be better some day, I hope, and I will try to help you. Our Father will not lay upon you a heavier burden than you are able to bear, but with the temptation will also make a way to escape. Nelly did not quite understand what he meant ; but they were grand, beautiful words, she thought, and they comforted her.

She was very tired and stiff with the cold, and she could only limp along very slowly, so that it was long, long past midnight when they reached home. Her new friend took a roll of bread out



of his pocket, which he made Nelly eat as she walked along.

‘I wish I could get a cup of hot coffee,’ he said, ‘but there is no place near. Try to go to sleep as soon as you can, my child.’

‘Yes, sir ;’ said Nelly, wearily. She was so cold and tired now that she could not help crying.

‘You must give me your name and address,’ said he, ‘and I will come and see you very soon.’

So Nelly told him. When they reached the house he said :

‘Good night, Nelly ; you are a brave little girl. God bless you!’ His voice was very soft and gentle as he spoke, it sounded to Nelly almost like music ; and she stood watching him till he disappeared in the mist and darkness, and then she turned to her miserable bed, while the kind stranger went back to his work.





## CHAPTER V.

### A TEA-PARTY.

**F**OR a few days after this midnight adventure, Nelly's father seemed rather ashamed of himself, and did not go again to the public-house.

Nelly herself felt full of pains and aches, and went about her work very wearily ; for standing so long in the rain had given her a bad cold. Her father felt quite reproached every time he heard her cough.

Nelly was always looking out for the kind stranger ; but as two or three days passed and he did not come, she too began to think he would be unfaithful, like Annie, and to give up hope of seeing him again.

On the fourth day, she was singing Tommy to

sleep to her favourite hymn, when she heard a gentle tap at the door. She opened it, and there stood her stranger friend. He smiled at Nelly with a kind, grave smile, and held out his hand.

‘How are you, Nelly?’ he said; ‘may I come in?’

‘Yes, please, sir,’ said Nelly, and she handed him one of the chairs that Mr. Green had mended. She had been longing to see him, yet, now he was come, she felt quite shy, and could not remember one of the things she wanted to say. But the stranger had plenty of things to say to her, and very soon she forgot her shyness.

‘Did I hear you singing a hymn?’ he asked.

‘Yes, sir,’ answered Nelly.

‘Are you fond of hymns?’

‘Yes, very,’ said Nelly, brightening. ‘Annie gave me this book, and I have learnt ever so many, and I try to sing them to the twins. No one else seems to care about them.’

‘You don’t go to school, then?’

‘Oh, no; I should like to, but it’s too far off, and I have no tidy dress.’

After a few more questions, the stranger said:

‘Well, Nelly, I came to ask you and your father to come and have tea with me to-morrow night.’

Nelly opened her eyes wide with astonishment. She had never been invited anywhere in her life before.

‘Will you come?’ he said, with a smile.

‘I must ask mother,’ said Nelly.

‘Bring your mother too. I shall quite expect you; and if you don’t come I shall fetch you. Never mind about your dress; only wash your hands and face, and wear any old dress. Now, promise to come.’

Nelly was delighted, and gladly promised to come herself, and bring her father and mother too if she could.

Then, after a few more kind words, the gentleman told her where the tea was to be, in a room very near, and got up to go.

At the door he turned back.

‘Have you a Testament, Nelly?’

‘No, sir.’

‘I will give you one, then, if you will promise to read it and keep it clean. Remember it is God’s

word. You shall have it to-morrow night. Good-bye.'

Nelly was in the greatest state of excitement about the kind stranger's invitation. Her father promised at once to go, but Mrs. Thomson quite refused. She said such places were not for her. She should be ashamed to show herself among decent folks. 'And I wonder you like to go, Nelly, such a dirty slut as you are. If you had any decent pride you would stay at home. And besides, I don't approve of your picking up with people in the streets.' But Mrs. Thomson had a way of objecting to everything; and as her father gave his consent, Nelly was determined to go, and she was very busy all the morning washing her frock to go in. It did not look very nice when it was done, for she had no iron to smooth it out, but, at any rate, it was clean; and she ran up all the largest holes, and fancied it looked quite tidy. As soon as she got the children off to school in the afternoon, she began to wash herself. Her face and hands had never had such a scrubbing before, and looked quite red and shiny, and felt very sore too, so that

Nelly thought it was almost more comfortable to be dirty.

At last her father came home, and at Nelly's suggestion washed himself, and the two set off.

The address the stranger had given was very near. The door of the house stood wide open, and there was a bright light inside, and Nelly's friend himself standing there waiting for his visitors.

He seemed very pleased to see Nelly and her father, and led them into a large room, where there were plenty of lights and a large fire, and two long tables spread with clean white cloths, and great plates full of bread and butter and cake.

A few people were warming themselves round the fire. Most of them looked just as ragged and poor as Nelly, and she thought to herself that her mother would not have felt at all ashamed if she had come.

The gentleman told them to warm themselves till tea was ready. Very soon a kind-faced woman in a clean white cap came in with a large hissing urn full of tea, and they all stood round the table to say grace, and then made a capital meal.

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Nelly had never had such a nice meal before in her life, and she wished more than ever that her mother had been there. While they were at tea, Mr. Thomson asked the person next him who the stranger was.

‘Why, he’s Mr. Thornton,’ said the man.

‘But what is he?’

‘I don’t rightly know; a kind of parson, I think. Some folks call him a missionary; but I know he was uncommon kind to my poor wife when she was ill, and I could not refuse when he asked me here.’

‘Yes, he is a parson—a real reverend clergyman,’ put in a man near. ‘He belongs to the little Iron Mission Church in Green Street.’

When tea was over, the kind woman cleared the tables, and then Mr. Thornton told every one to turn towards the fire, and asked them if they would like to sing a hymn. Every one said yes; so he slowly read the words of each verse, and then set the tune. Nelly sang with all her heart, and after the first verse her father did so too.

‘And now, my dear friends, I want to talk to you,’ said Mr. Thornton, when the hymn was

finished. 'That was why I invited you here to-night. You listen to me for a little while first, and then I will listen to anything you have to say. First, I will read you a few words out of the Bible.' Then he opened his book and read slowly : 'Surely He hath borne *our* griefs and carried *our* sorrows ; and by His stripes we are healed.' 'These words come out of the Old Testament ; now I will read you some from the New Testament about the same person : "Though He was rich, yet for *our* sakes He became poor, that we through His poverty might be rich."

'All of you here know what it is to be poor—to have griefs and sorrows,' said Mr. Thornton ; 'and you would be very glad to escape from your hard lot. Now I want to tell you of One who gave up everything, joy and glory greater than we can imagine, and became poor, and sorrowful, and despised, and lonely, and all for love of us—that He might help us. Though He was King of heaven, and had myriads of angels to wait on Him, yet He became a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief, and He had not where to lay His head. I hope you have all heard His



name before, and that some of you love it. His name is Jesus — the most beautiful name ever heard by mortal ears.'

Then he told them of the great love of Jesus,— how He became a little child, obedient to His mother ; how He worked in the carpenter's shop with Joseph, so that He could sympathize with little children and working men ; how He then spent His life in going about doing good, and never turned away from any that came to Him ; how He was laughed at, ill-treated, and despised, and at last even forsaken by His own friends— those He loved most on earth ; and then, after having been beaten with stripes for our sins, He suffered the cruel and shameful death of the cross, and so, by His precious blood-shedding, purchased our salvation.

As Mr. Thornton spoke, all the poor people round him listened breathless, and many of the women began to sob when they heard the story of the Lord's great love ; even some of the rough men brushed the tears from their eyes. Nelly fixed her eyes on the speaker, and drank in every word.

‘That is the one the hymn tells about,’ she said in a loud whisper to her father.

‘And now I want every one of you here to become the servants of this kind, this blessed, this most loving Master. I want you to love Him; and if you love Him you will soon begin to serve Him. Oh, what would I give if I could only make you all love Jesus! Depend upon it, He is the best friend a working man can have. You have no idea how different life is when you know you have Jesus for your friend. And besides that, you have something better still to look forward to when this poor life is over. Then you will see your master face to face, and live with Him in glory for ever and ever. “Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath entered into the heart of man the things that God hath prepared for them that love Him.”

‘Do not think you *cannot serve* Him—that you are too poor, or too weak, or too busy. There is no one here—not one—who cannot do *something* for Him. Whether we eat or drink, or whatever we do, let us do all to the glory of God. If you have nothing else, give a kind word or a pleasant

smile, and remember that He has said : "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me."

When Mr. Thornton had left off speaking they sang some more hymns, and then he prayed.

After that there was a little silence, and then he stood up again and said : ' I want you all to come to tea every Wednesday through the winter. Will you all promise to come, and I will tell you more about Him ? ' Then he went about the room, and spoke a few kind words to each one.

Nelly and her father were slipping out quietly, but he stopped them.

' I promised to give you a book, Nelly,' he said ; ' here it is. Read it, my child, and you will find all about our blessed Lord,' and he gave her a little red Testament.

' Oh, father,' said Nelly, when they had walked a little way, ' did you know about Jesus before ? Why did not you tell me ? We will love Him ; won't we, father ? '

To Nelly's surprise her father did not answer.



## CHAPTER VI.

### NELLY'S ACCIDENT.

**A**ND all this time the Greens and the Thomsons had never spoken again to each other. Mr. Green had strictly forbidden any of his children to speak to the young Thomsons. He thought they were low, and badly brought up, and would only do his children harm. Mrs. Green felt very indignant with Nelly, and believed she had really intended to lead her Annie astray. Annie was the only one who kept any kind feeling for them. She often felt sorry when Nelly limped by with her sad face, and she heard her cough, and saw her poor, thin clothing; and she longed to run out and say one kind word to her, but she dared not. Mrs. Green was angry if she even mentioned Nelly's name, and blamed Mrs. Thomson right and left.

The morning after the tea-party, Nelly rose with her head full of new thoughts. It seemed to her as though a new life had begun for her. She knelt down and told the blessed Lord how much she wanted to love Him, and asked Him to help her to serve Him that day.

She was busy enough all day, but Mr. Thornton's words kept running in her head: 'Whatever we do, let us do all to the glory of God.' Her mother was not well, and was obliged to stay at home from her work, and Nelly tried to tell her everything that Mr. Thornton had said, and begged her to go to the tea-party next Wednesday.

'Such places are not for the likes of me. I never was given to gadding about,' said Mrs. Thomson. 'It's all very fine what he told you, I daresay, but I'm too hard-worked and miserable to attend to such things.'

Nelly determined in her own heart that she would ask Mr. Thornton himself to come and talk to her mother. He looked so kind, she felt sure he would do it. She had her little red book safely in her pocket, and now and then she took a peep at it, though she had not time to read more than a

few words. She found that marks were put against many of the verses.

The twins by this time were able to crawl about the room, so that they got dirtier than ever; and Nelly often longed for Annie to come and help her to wash them.

‘I told you they were proud, stuck-up people,’ said her mother, ‘and they would soon get tired of us. I’m very sorry you ever made friends with such a girl; it’s only made you discontented ever since, hankering after what you can’t get; and now she won’t even speak to you in the street.’

‘It’s not Annie’s fault, I’m sure, mother,’ said Nelly, ‘she is so kind and good; and she looked so sorry that day I ran after her, when she told me her father would not let her speak to me. It’s her father and mother, I’m sure.’

‘More shame for them, I say,’ answered Mrs. Thomson. ‘Do take Tommy.’

Little Jimmy looked a healthy baby, but Tommy was always ailing, and never seemed happy out of Nelly’s arms. As soon as she took him he would smile, and looked quite contented, but the moment she put him down he began to whimper

again, and to call 'Nelly, Nelly,' in a little weak voice. That was the only word he had learned to say.

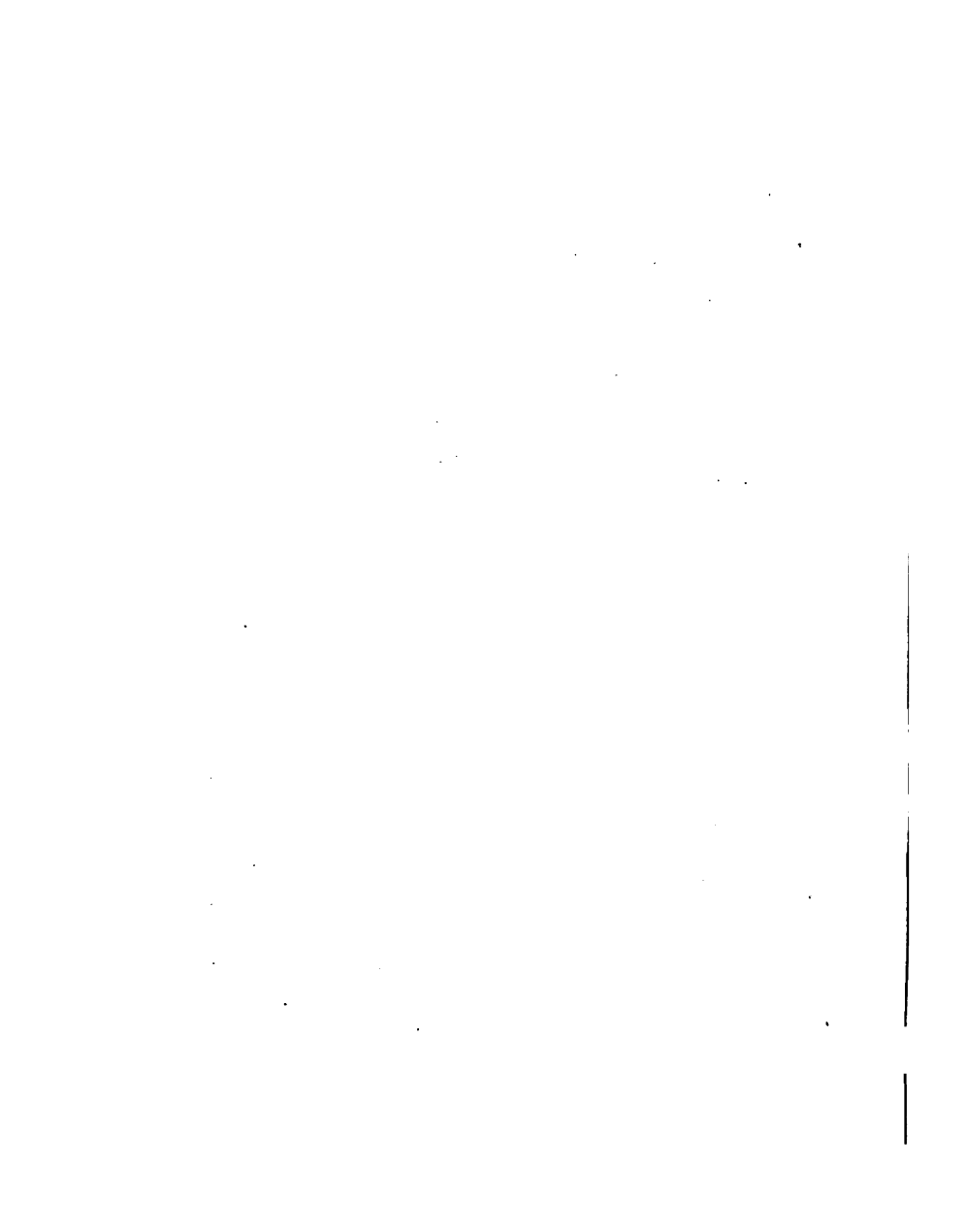
That afternoon Nelly was standing for a minute at the door : the little Greens were just starting off for school. Nelly could see Annie tying comforters round their necks. One of them, a little boy called Jack, who went to the infant school, had run out into the road, and was coming towards Nelly. Just then a great brewer's dray, with two immense horses, came very fast down the street.

In an agony Annie called to Jack to get out of the way, but he did not hear her. She ran towards him, but stopped, quite frightened at the horses, which were so close. Nelly saw it all, and that Annie had not the courage to go on ; and without thinking of danger, she rushed forward, caught little Jack by the arm, and dragged him out of the way—just in time to save him, but not in time to save herself. She fell down, and for a moment all was dark, and she felt a horrible crushing pain, which seemed to go all over her. Then she jumped up, and asked, 'Is Jack safe?'



NELLY SAVING JACK FROM THE HORSES.





She just heard a voice say, 'Yes, yes; bless you, my child,' and she gave a great cry, and fell down again, senseless.

After that Nelly remembered nothing for a long, long time—only a confusion of sounds and faces and dreadful pain, till one morning she woke up and found herself lying in bed; but it was not her own bed, it was too clean and soft. She tried to get up, but could not even raise her head from the pillow. So she lay there very contentedly, but wondering where she could be. She fancied it must be Annie's bed, for she heard strange voices in the room, and she thought perhaps it was Mrs. Green talking.

Presently some one came to her, and gently lifted her up in the bed, and propped her up with pillows, and said in a very kind voice, 'Are you a little better, dear?'

Nelly looked up, and saw a very kind face with a neat white cap round it looking at her.

'Where am I?' asked Nelly; and when she spoke, her voice sounded so strange and weak that she did not think it could be her own.

'You have been very ill, dear; but you are

getting better. Drink this,' and the lady gave her some nice beef-tea.

After the beef-tea Nelly felt a little more able to speak.

'Is Jack safe?' she whispered.

'Yes, dear; quite safe and well.'

'You are not Mrs. Green, are you? Where is Annie?'

'No; I am Sister Agnes. Annie will come to see you soon. Now you had better go to sleep again;' and Sister Agnes took away one of the pillows, and laid Nelly's weary head very gently down, and soon she fell asleep.

When she woke again she looked up, and there was Annie sitting by her bed. Annie smiled, and stooped down and kissed her.

'I am so glad you are better, Nelly,' she whispered. Nelly tried to answer, but she began to cry instead.

'Oh, don't cry, Nelly, or I shall have to go,' said Annie, in a distressed voice.

'Sing to me, just once!' said Nelly, faintly.

Annie took hold of her hand, and sang very softly Nelly's favourite hymn:

'I heard the voice of Jesus say,  
Come unto me and rest.'

From that day Nelly began to get better, though very, very slowly.

She was in a hospital, and kind Sister Agnes nursed her most tenderly.

Nelly was in a large cheerful room, with many other white beds in it; but everything was so quiet, and clean, and comfortable, that it seemed to her like another world. She felt no desire to rise from her bed, but lay there week after week, bearing all her pains very patiently. For she did suffer a great deal of pain. Her lame foot had been crushed under the wheel of the brewer's dray, and the doctor had been obliged to cut it off.

Annie did not know this, till one morning she seemed so much better than usual, that Sister Agnes said she had better get up. While she was being dressed, Nelly saw that her poor foot was gone. Sister Agnes had attended to it, and bound it up every day; but as Nelly was lying in bed all the while, she never saw that she had no foot, but only a stump. She cried very bitterly at this discovery. Sister Agnes tried to

comfort her, and gave her some nice drink, and put her into a beautiful arm-chair, and wheeled her to the fire. But Nelly felt more ill and weak now she was up than she had done before, and she longed to go back again to her little bed. However, from that day, she always got up for an hour or two, and at last she began to feel a little strength.

Annie came to see her every day, and often brought her a little fruit, or something else that was nice to eat.

Her father came every Saturday afternoon, and sat with Nelly a long time. Nelly fancied that he looked much nicer than he used to do. His face and everything about him looked different, and his voice sounded so much more gentle.

One day she asked him if he had seen anything more of Mr. Thornton.

‘Yes, Nelly; I have been there every week, and he’s the best friend I ever had.’

‘I have his little book here,’ said Nelly, pulling it out of her pocket; ‘but I can’t read, it makes my head so bad. Sister has prayers with us every day, and tells me things sometimes; but she

is so busy. I wish you would read to me, father, you read so nicely.'

'That I will, my dear. I will go right through one of the Gospels, if you like;' and he took the book and began St. Luke's Gospel.

'Mr. Thornton has been reading that to us on Wednesday nights. I wish you could hear him, Nelly. He wants me to go to church, too, but I am waiting till you come home.'

'Does mother go?' asked Nelly.

'Sometimes; I can't get her to go often. She misses you terribly. Jane can't manage the twins half as you do. Tommy does fret after you terrible. When you first went away he did nothing but cry "Nelly, Nelly!" till it made one's heart ache to hear him.'

Nelly's eyes filled with tears.

'Poor little Tommy; I wish I might have him here. But I shall never be able to carry him about any more, father. I don't know what good I shall be when I get home, with only one foot. I feel so weak—as though I could never work again. Do you know, father, I often wish I had died, and then I should be no more trouble to any one.'

‘Never say the like of that again, my girl,’ said her father. ‘I think it would just break my heart to lose you; you will live to be a comfort and a help to us all, I know.’

‘Oh, father, how can I?’ asked Nelly; and then she leaned her head back on the pillow, and seemed to be asleep. After a time she opened her eyes again, and said: ‘I’ve often wanted to ask you something, father, if you won’t be angry?’

‘What is it, child? I don’t think I can ever be angry with you again.’

‘You don’t ever drink too much now, do you?’

‘No, Nelly,’ answered her father, slowly; ‘you saved me from that. I have scarcely ever been to a public-house since the night you came after me, and waited there in the cold and rain, so brave and kind. I can’t forget the way you looked when I came out, Nelly, though I was half stupid with drink. But all the time you were so ill, I seemed to see your eyes like looking at me, as they did then, and I don’t think I can ever get in such a state again.’

‘I am so glad,’ answered Nelly.



## CHAPTER VII.

### NELLY RETURNS HOME.

**N**ELLY was a very long time getting well. Week after week she lay on her little bed, or the invalid-chair, very patient and happy, but often suffering a great deal of pain. Her head was too weak to read ; but she grew tired at last of doing nothing, and kind Sister Agnes taught her how to make pretty needle-books and pin-cushions, and all sorts of little things, which were sold to the ladies who used to come to visit the hospital. Some of the ladies used to bring Nelly odd bits of silk and dolls to dress.

At first Nelly was very awkward, and her work was very bad. But Sister Agnes was a patient teacher, and Nelly took a great deal of pains, and in time she became quite clever. She was very proud when one kind lady paid her half-a-crown



for dressing a beautiful wax doll for her little girl.

‘I could not have done it more neatly myself,’ said the lady; and no praise could have pleased Nelly more.

The next time her father came, Nelly gave him the half-crown, and begged him to buy something for her mother with it.

‘I shall be a little use now when I get home,’ she said, brightly, ‘I can work and keep the twins and the children tidy; and I have been thinking, father, that perhaps I might earn a little money too by doing work for ladies. One lady here has promised to come and see me when I go home, and she says I shall do some work for her, and she will pay me. What a long time it is since mother has been to see me! I suppose she is too tired, though?’

‘Yes,’ answered her father, with a pained look; ‘she is very busy now, and she does not like to leave the children.’

At last, when the pleasant spring-time came, and the bright sunshine, Nelly really began to grow quite strong, and the doctor said she might have a wooden foot fixed on to her leg.

This hurt her a great deal at first, and it was a good while before she was able to walk about comfortably; but in time she got quite used to it, and could walk even better than she had done before her accident. So the time came when she was to leave the hospital. That was a very sad day for poor Nelly; she had been so happy there, and every one was so kind, and she had grown so fond of Sister Agnes, that she cried very bitterly when she had to say good-bye.

When Nelly went out of the great door of the hospital for the last time, she looked a very different person from the poor, dirty, ragged girl who had been carried in months ago. She had grown very tall during her illness, and now she looked fat and healthy, and beautifully clean and neat. A lady had given her an old gown, which Sister Agnes had helped her to alter. All her other clothes, too, were nicely washed and mended.

Nelly's father had put on his best clothes to fetch her. It was something quite new for him to have best clothes. The sunshine looked very bright and pleasant, and the air felt very sweet as they walked along. And Nelly was thinking how

nice it would be to see her mother and all the children again.

‘And dear little Tommy, too. I wonder whether he will remember me! Is he much altered?’ she asked.

Her father did not seem to hear her question, and began to talk about something else. Nelly thought this strange, and she looked at him, and thought his face looked very sad.

‘Is anything the matter, father?’ she asked.

‘Matter, Nelly!’ he said; ‘what should be the matter when you are coming home so well and strong, and are going to make us all so happy?’

When they reached the house he began to say something, and then checked himself. Nelly opened the door and hastened in. As she looked round a little chill came over her. The room did look so wretched after the beautiful place she had left. There was a good deal more furniture in it than there used to be, but it was no cleaner or tidier.

Her mother was sitting in one corner, looking very pale and sad. She was crouching over a little fire. Nelly gave her a hearty kiss.

‘How are you, mother?’ she said. She was going to add, ‘I am so glad to be home again,’ but the words stuck in her throat.

‘I’m the same as usual,’ answered her mother; ‘but you look such a fine lady, Nell, you will never be able to put up with our ways.’

Nelly felt pained, and looked round again. Why was there such a strange silence in the room?

‘Are the twins asleep?’ said Nelly.

‘Asleep! ay, ay, asleep,’ answered her mother, in a strange tone; and her father went out of the room.

Nelly went softly towards the cradle, which stood in a dark corner, and gently lifted the dirty covering; but the cradle was empty!

‘Are they up-stairs?’ she asked, with a sudden sinking at her heart.

‘Up-stairs! no; they are dead!’ cried her mother.

‘Dead!’ answered Nelly; ‘oh! what do you mean?’

‘Yes; dead! dead! dead! and I’m glad of it, Nell, that I am. It broke my heart to see them fretting or pining away day after day. Starved, I say they were. First Tommy went. He did

nothing but fret, fret after you at first; then he faded away, and went out just like the wick of a candle, with no more noise. Then little Jimmy, he seemed to miss him like, and he began to moan and fret too. He felt cold and lonely, I fancy, without Tommy, and he very soon went too.'

Nelly was crying very bitterly. 'Why didn't father tell me? Oh, Tommy, Tommy! I did think so much about seeing him again.'

'Father said it would only make you worse to tell you. But why do you cry, Nell? I'm glad, I tell you. I'm sure there was nothing for the poor dears to live for here. Oh dear! I wish I was dead too.'

'Hush, hush, mother; don't talk like that,' said Nelly.

'But I do, Nell; I'm worn out, and tired of life, and I shall never get any rest till I'm in my grave, that's certain.'

'Yes, you will, mother. I am strong and well now, and I will work for you. I've been thinking a great deal about it, and how it's all to be. Father says he does not drink now, so I suppose he brings home his wages regular; and you shall

stay at home and rest, and Jane and I can do all the work.'

'It's fine talking, Nell,' answered her mother, 'but I know it can't be. Other folks get rest, but I never shall. I shall go dragging on, work, work, work, till the end. Your father goes to the hospital and gets rest and good living, and so do you, but nothing good ever happens to me.'

'Oh, yes, it does, mother. Why, is not it good that father's left off drinking?'

'Yes; good for him, I suppose, but it don't make much difference to me. We get more to eat, certainly, now the little ones are gone, and it's too late to do them any good. But I see no more of your father than I used to. I might as well have no husband. He goes out at night just as much as ever to his meetings and his bands and things; and now he's taken into his head he must have respectable clothes, too.'

Nelly looked round the dirty, disorderly room, and could not much wonder that her father did go out. She herself felt that she could never be comfortable in such a room again.

'I'll try and make the place look a little more

comfortable,' she said, cheerfully; 'and then, perhaps, father will stay at home more.'

'You'll soon get tired of it, Nell,' answered her mother; 'and what can a poor lame thing like you do?'

'I will try,' said Nelly. 'And now, mother, you go and lie down on your bed a bit, while I get tea ready.'

Mrs. Thomson went up-stairs, and Nelly was left alone. It seemed a very sad welcome to the poor girl after being away so long—long enough to feel that she never could live again in such dirt. So she began her work at once. She had a whole afternoon before her, and she determined to make the very most of it. First, she neatly folded up the things in the cradle, and collected all the little clothes that had been worn by the twins, determining to wash them the next day and put them all carefully away. She cried very much while she was doing this, for she had loved them dearly, especially little Tommy; and the house seemed terribly quiet and desolate without them.

Then Nelly cleaned the grate and swept the room, and arranged everything quite neatly, and set out the tea-things after she had given them all

a good washing. She had just finished her task, and was putting on the kettle to boil, when there came a knocking at the door, and there was Annie, looking as fresh and bright as ever.

Annie threw her arms round Nelly's neck, and gave her a hearty kiss. Nelly remembered the time when Annie had turned from her, and could not kiss her.

'Oh, Nelly!' she cried, 'I am so glad to see you well again. I may come and see you as much as ever I like now, mother says; and she wants to tell you herself how sorry she is she so misjudged you. She did try to help your mother when the twins were ill; but she is so strange.'

'Yes; poor mother seems so unhappy,' answered Nelly. 'I have got her to go and rest a bit while I got the tea ready. I've been trying to make the place look a little more comfortable.'

'Yes, you have made it quite nice, Nell. I did not know you were come, and I ran in to see if I could tidy it a little before you came, but I am too late.'

'It's very dirty, though,' said Nelly. 'I could not do more than make it look tidy to-day; to-morrow I shall give it all a regular cleaning.'



'I will come and help you,' said Annie; 'and mother has sent you in a few things for tea. There's a loaf she made herself, and a plain cake, and a pot of honey aunt brought from the country, and a bit of pork. Mother thought you'd been so long in the hospital you'd want something nice, And here are some fresh eggs, and a bunch of flowers.'

'Oh, Annie, how kind you are! it's too much,' cried Nelly.

The two girls set out all the good things on the table, and put the flowers in the middle; and then they sat down and had a chat together till the children came home from school, and it was time for Annie to go home.

The children seemed very glad to see Nelly home again. They looked much more healthy and warmly dressed than they used to be, but they were as dirty as ever. It quite disgusted Nelly to see so much dirt. She took them into the back kitchen and gave all their faces and hands a good washing, as she had seen the nurses do to the children in the hospital. Then she called her mother to tea.

As they were sitting down, in came Mr. Thomson.

‘Why, this looks quite cheerful and pleasant,’ he said, rubbing his hands. ‘You have begun to work wonders already, Nell—the place looks quite different.’ And after tea he never attempted to go out, but sat by the fire and listened to all Nelly had to tell about the hospital. Presently Mr. and Mrs. Green came in, to welcome Nelly home, and tell her how thankful they were to her for saving their little Jack’s life, and how sorry they were that it had led to such an accident.

‘But I’m very glad,’ answered Nelly. ‘If my foot had not been run over I never should have gone to the hospital, and that has been the best time of my life, I think.’

‘Well, my dear, all I can say is,’ said Mr. Green, ‘if ever you are in any trouble, or if ever you want a friend, come to John Green, and he’ll do anything in the world for you.’

So Nelly’s first evening at home turned out to be a very pleasant one after all.

Mr. and Mrs. Green went away saying they had never seen any one so improved in their lives; they would not have known it was poor Nelly Thomson.



## CHAPTER VIII.

### NELLY'S ANXIETIES.

**N**OW Nelly was well and strong again, she was determined to try to make her home happier and more comfortable—more like what a home ought to be. It was a hard task for a young girl to undertake, but Nelly was very brave; and she had need of all her strength and all her bravery.

First, there was her mother to be thought of and cared for. She, poor woman, had had little enough care and love during her life. Nelly had never before noticed how thin and careworn she looked, how hollow her eyes were, and how sad her face; for though she declared she was glad the twins were gone, she really fretted after them a great deal. She still went out to work two or three times a week, but Nelly determined to try and get

her to stay at home altogether, and only just help in cleaning the house. 'I'm sure I might earn as much as she does by my needlework,' thought Nelly. During that long quiet time in the hospital while she was getting better, Nelly had thought a great deal, and she had come home with her head full of plans which Sister Agnes had helped her to form. Next to her mother, her father was Nelly's chief anxiety. How she wished she could get him to come home regularly and spend his evenings at home, as Mr. Green did! It was true that he seemed to have given up drinking, but he still spent his evenings out—*sometimes*, Nelly feared, in the public-house; and she could not wonder at it. How could she expect him to sit down contentedly in such a wretched house as his? She remembered so well the evening he came back from the hospital, how disappointed she felt because he seemed so discontented. She felt just the same herself now. She knew what cleanliness and comfort were, and she felt that she *could not* go back to the old, wretched, muddling way of living, and she knew her father could not either; so she made up her mind to do her very best to make the house plea-

sant and cheerful, so that he might enjoy himself there in the evenings.

Then, after her father, came the children. They were growing up with such idle, bad habits—in fact, they had no training at all at home, and grew every week more unruly. Their mother never seemed to look after them at all. She found fault with them for almost everything they did, but she never troubled to teach them the right way. You will think these were enough burdens for one small pair of shoulders; and so they were.

Nelly found the task she had set herself no easy one, but she began it at once—the very day she came back from the hospital, as we have seen. The next day, with Annie's help, she began her thorough cleaning; and by the end of the week the house had been well scrubbed all over, and almost every article of clothing and bed-covering had been washed.

‘We are clean now, at any rate, that's a comfort,’ said Nelly; ‘but do you know, Annie, they don't seem to care whether they are clean or dirty. I don't think I did till I went to the hospital. I don't think I knew the difference till I saw you, Annie.’

'They'll soon learn the difference, I should think,' answered Annie.

'I hope so, I'm sure,' said Nelly, with a shade of her old desponding look on her face.

'Will you go with us to church to-morrow?' said Annie; 'mother said I might ask you.'

'I should like to so much,' replied Nelly, brightening up. 'I did go to the chapel at the hospital after I got my new foot, and it was lovely.'

'I will run in for you, then, at half-past ten.'

'But I thought you went to the Sunday school first,' said Nelly.

'I only go to school now in the afternoon. Mother is not very strong, and there's plenty to do in the morning.'

Nelly's first thought on Sunday morning was, how nice it would be to go to church. She jumped out of bed and dressed herself very neatly, and then got breakfast ready, and made a great pudding of all the scraps for dinner. Then she waited and waited, but her father and mother did not come down. She made the children get up, and gave the little ones a good washing, which they did not much approve of. By the time this was done she

heard a church clock strike ten, so she gave them all their breakfast and ate her own, and then put on her hat and took her little red Testament in her hand, and waited for Annie. She asked Jane to go too, but Jane refused.

Just as the church bells were beginning to ring, Mr. Thomson came down yawning.

‘Why, Nelly, girl,’ he said, ‘where are you going? I wanted to take you for a walk with me. I’ll soon eat my breakfast, and then I’ll give myself a cleaning, and we’ll go out together. It’s a lovely morning for a walk.’

‘Annie Green promised to fetch me to go with her to church, father,’ said Nelly, looking disappointed. She could not quite make up her mind which she would rather do,—go for a walk with her father, or the church with Annie; either would be a treat.

‘You’ll go with your fine new friends, of course, and leave your poor father alone,’ said he.

A bright idea struck Nelly.

‘You go to church first with us, and then we can take a walk, father,’ she said. ‘You know you said you would go to church when I came home.’

‘No, no, Nell; church is not for the likes of us.’

Better leave that for the gentlefolks, as I always tell Mr. Thornton. You come and go for a nice walk with me; we'll get into the parks, and see the green trees and things.'

It did sound very tempting, and Nelly did not like to disappoint her poor father, but she longed to join in the sweet singing at church once more, and to hear some good, comforting words too,—something more about the Lord Jesus. The good clergyman at the hospital and Sister Agnes had both told her to try and go to church at least once every Sunday, and to get her father and mother to go too, if she could.

'If they will not go with you, you must try to go alone, Nelly,' Sister Agnes had said. 'You must not mind if they are a little cross about it at first; they will soon get over that, and very likely end by going with you. You know you cannot get on and learn what is right unless you are taught; and if you love God you will want to worship Him in His house.'

While Nellie was hesitating, Mrs. Green and Annie came to the door.

Mr. Thomson felt rather ashamed at being



caught at breakfast so late, and in his dirty clothes, too; but Mrs. Green did not appear to notice it, and said good morning very pleasantly.

‘It’s time to start, Nelly dear,’ she said. ‘I see you are all ready. Come along.’

Nelly looked at her father inquiringly. ‘I will go for a walk with you instead, if you want me, father,’ she whispered.

Mr. Thomson was at heart a good-natured man, and he saw Nelly really wanted to go to church, so he said :

‘No, no, Nelly; go off with your friends, like a good girl.’

So Nelly went; but she could not feel quite comfortable in her own mind, and she hardly spoke to Annie all the way to the church door. When they went into the church, and the service began, Nelly forgot her troubles in pleasure and wonder. She thought the church the most beautiful place she had ever seen in her life; and as for the singing! she could have listened to it for ever, she thought; though she could not understand *all* the prayers: some of them seemed to say exactly what she wanted to, only she did not know

how. The reading and the preaching she understood nearly all.

‘Oh, Annie!’ she said, as they were coming out, ‘I never enjoyed anything so much before. I do hope father will let me go with you always. I wish he would come too. And how nicely that old gentleman did talk! He told me ever so many things I wanted to know; I could not help fancying he must know something about me. Was not it nice what he said about doing everything for Jesus’ sake? I remember that is what Mr. Thornton said the night we had tea there; and I thought then I would begin directly, and always do everything for Jesus; and I was trying to begin the very next day, when I had the accident. I am afraid since then I have forgotten; at least I do think of it sometimes, and then when anything very tiresome comes I forget it; but it does seem to make everything so much easier when you do think of it; doesn’t it, Annie?’

‘Yes,’ answered Annie; ‘but I had no idea you were so good, Nelly.’

‘Me good! Oh, Annie, what an idea!’ said Nelly. ‘I should like to be good, very much indeed, like

you are ; but I am afraid I never shall be. I have wanted to be ever since that day when you came and brought us the new loaf. Do you remember, Annie ? You did look so nice and so good, and I did so wish I could be like you ; and then you were going to kiss me, and you turned away, and I knew it was because I was nasty and dirty, and it made me feel so miserable and ashamed.'

'Well, Nelly, you are not dirty now ; you are just as clean and nice as I am, and I am sure you are much cleverer than I am too, and much braver. I was dreadfully frightened when I saw the horses coming close up to Jack, and I felt as though I could not move, and you ran directly and saved him. I'm sure you made me feel ashamed then. Father says he never knew such a brave thing for a little girl to do. Father does think a lot of you now, Nelly, I can tell you ; and mother too.'

'I never could think why your father was angry with me before that,' said Nelly, 'and why he would not let you come to see me. He was so kind for a little while, and then he quite turned

against me, and you would not even speak. Do tell me why it was, Annie.'

So Annie told Nelly how angry her father was with her for reading the story-books in bed. 'Father was angry with you too, Nelly, and he thought you did me harm. But I knew it was not your fault, and that you were not really bad; and I did so long to tell you so, but father would not let me. I was very sorry, indeed I was, Nelly.'

By this time they had reached home, so the little girls said good-bye.

Nelly found her father reading a newspaper and smoking a pipe. Her mother was fast asleep in her chair, the children were quarrelling in the back yard, and the remains of the breakfast were still on the table. Nelly sighed: she was tired, and would have been glad to rest, but she saw that she must not think of rest yet; so she took off her hat, put on her working-apron, and began to clean up, thinking all the while of what the clergyman had said: 'And do all still for Jesus' sake.' And gradually the cloud cleared off her face, and she began to tell her father all about the service and the sermon.

He laid down his paper, and seemed pleased to listen.

‘You are a good little girl, Nell,’ he said. ‘I declare I will try to go with you myself next Sunday. But how pale and tired you look, child! Jane, Jane!’ he called; ‘come here and make yourself useful. It’s a shame to let your sister do everything, and never help her a bit. You must not drive a willing horse to death.’

Jane came in and rather sulkily began to help. Nelly was glad enough to rest for a little. In the evening she and her father went for a walk, and then she told him something of her plans and hopes; and as he was in a very good temper, he promised to help her to make the house look more tidy by putting up some shelves and nails.





## CHAPTER IX.

### NELLY AND HER FATHER.

**N**ELLY was determined to keep her father to his word, so the very next day she made the room look as tidy as she could before he came in from his work, and fried him a rasher of bacon for his tea. She knew that that generally put him into a good temper; and then, when he was taking up his hat to go out after tea as usual, she stopped him, saying:

‘Father, don’t you know you promised to put up a shelf and some nails? Mr. Green has given me these planks of wood, and has lent me his hammer. He wants it back to-morrow, so you will do it to-night, won’t you, father?’

Her father hesitated. He was only going out for the sake of doing something, not because he had anywhere to go to; and he knew that most

likely if he went out he should meet some acquaintance, and turn into a public-house.

He had been to the public-house a good many times again lately, since the Wednesday teas had been given up for the summer, and when there he found it very hard to go away before he had taken too much. Though he always felt vexed and angry with himself the next morning for being so weak, the next time the temptation came he generally yielded again. He thought of all this, and he looked at Nelly's pleading face, and that conquered him. He put down his hat and turned back.

‘Well, and what is it you want me to do, Nell?’ he said. ‘I’ll just stay for half-an-hour.’

Nelly showed him the plank, and where she wanted it fixed, and he soon set to work. He was clever at carpentering, and soon grew interested in his job. Nelly stood by him all the time, handing the nails as he wanted them, and making suggestions. She was quite delighted that her plan had succeeded so well. And so the half-hour soon slipped on into two hours, and it was time to go to bed, and even then the job was

not half done; for Mr. Thomson had discovered several other improvements he might easily make in the room besides putting up a shelf.

‘We must leave off now, Nell,’ he said; ‘I’ll do some more to-morrow night.’

And so he found occupation for many nights to come. Mr. Green, who was a carpenter, was always ready to lend Nelly tools, and often found her bits of wood and things which could be turned to account.

Nelly was delighted with her shelves—they enabled her to keep the room ever so much more tidy; and she got her father to put up a row of pegs, for the children to hang their clothes on. Then Mr. Green gave him some old hinges, and he put up a cupboard in one corner. When Thomson was in any difficulty, Green was always willing to come in and give him a little help, and so the two men grew to know each other, and in a little while they became quite chums; for Green found that Thomson was a very interesting man, and could tell him a great many things about books and foreign countries that he had never heard before. And Thomson found that Green



was very clever in other ways, and could put him up to ever so many useful contrivances.

Thomson found, too, that by not going to the public-house he often had a spare shilling or two to give to Nelly. So she bought some new cups and plates to put on the new shelves, and several other useful things they wanted.

One evening Nelly had been in to Mrs. Green's to borrow the paper for her father; when she came back she looked round with a very discontented air.

'What is the matter, Nell?' said her father.

'I don't know what it is, father,' answered she; 'you have put up all these shelves and things, and done ever so much to make the place look comfortable, and yet it doesn't look nice—it looks so different to the Greens', and I can't think why. Jane and I scrub and clean, and rub and dust, but we never can get the place to look clean.'

'We must try to get a bit of carpet, and a few pictures to paste on the wall; then it will look all right,' said her father.

'No, no, it is not that,' answered Nelly, doubtfully. Presently she looked up quite

brightly. 'I've found out what it is,' she cried; 'it's the wall and the ceiling. Why, the paper's nearly black, and so is the ceiling. Oh dear, how I wish I could buy a new paper!'

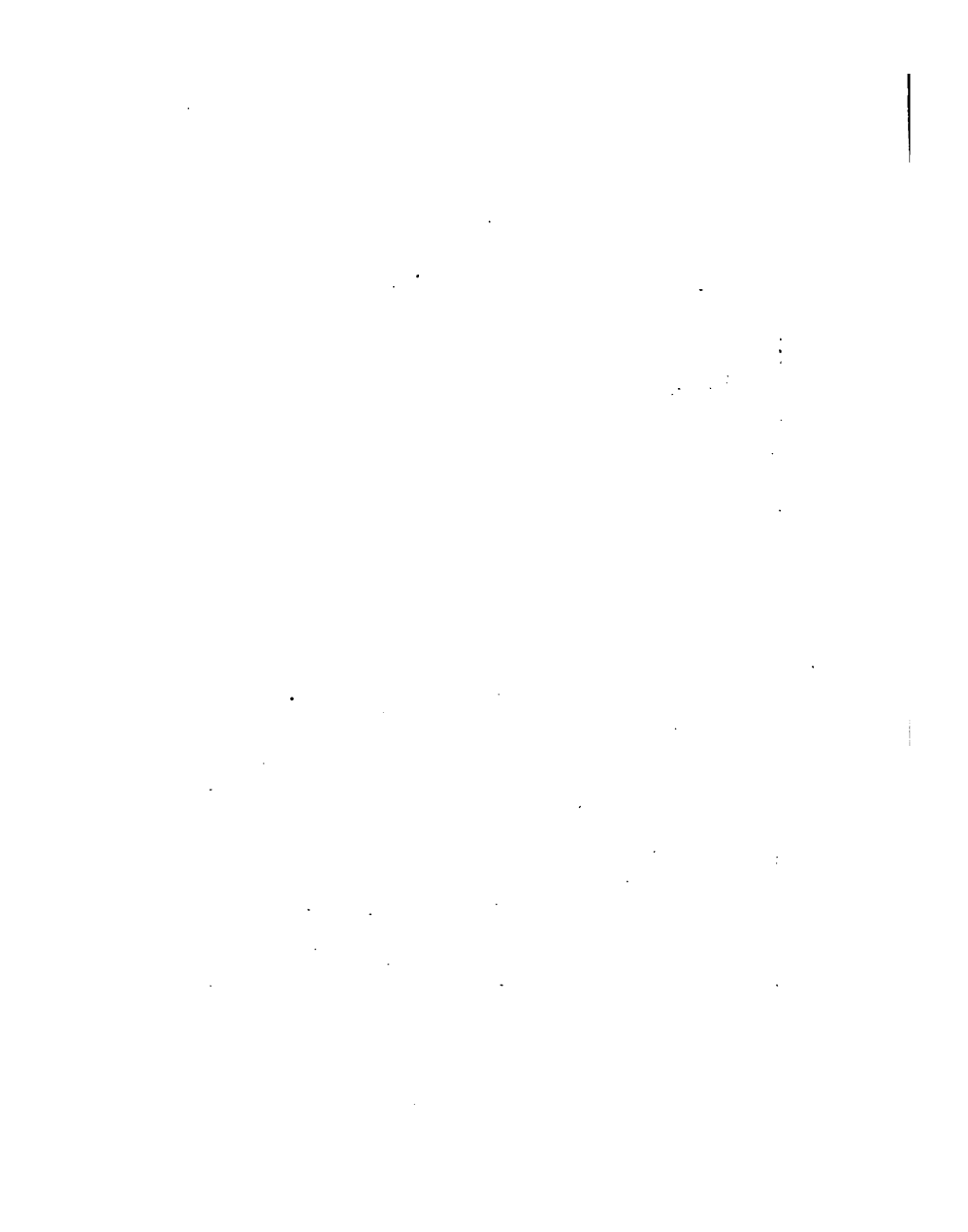
Nelly now set her heart upon getting a new paper, but she could not see how she could manage it at all. She thought she would like to earn the money herself, but how? She remembered the kind lady who used to come to the hospital, and had promised to give her some needlework; but the lady had never been to see her as she promised, and Nelly knew of no one else. There was Mr. Thornton; but he had never called since Nelly had been home. She often longed to see him, and to tell him about all her troubles and pleasures; for still Nelly had a great many troubles, and sometimes she felt almost in despair, her mother was so irritable and low, and instead of seeming pleased with all the improvements, she was more cross than ever, both to Nelly and her husband. She declared they were getting too grand for her, and she went about almost more dirty than ever; at least so it seemed to Nelly, whose eyes were now accustomed to

cleanliness. This often made Mr. Thomson cross too—he could not bear to see his wife such a disgraceful figure; and though he took Nelly for a walk every Sunday now, and very often went to church with her, he never would take his wife. He said he should be ashamed to be seen with such a slattern. And then sometimes Mr. Thomson would get very angry, and there would be a regular quarrel, and Nelly almost began to fancy she had done more harm than good. But when she remembered the miserable old days, she knew that was not true,—when her father used to come home intoxicated night after night, and there were almost fights, and she used to lie trembling in her miserable bed with fear, to think of what might happen next. And then she thought of that night before her father was taken away to the hospital, how he had knocked her down; and she shuddered, and tried to drive the ugly thought away. Her father was not the same man now. She felt certain that nothing in the world could ever induce him to do such a thing again.

One day Nelly was singing at her work, when she was startled by a loud knocking at the door.



A GRAND VISIT.



She opened it to a tall man dressed in a fine green coat, with silver buttons.

‘Does a girl named Nelly Thomson live here?’ he asked.

‘Yes; that’s me, sir,’ answered Nelly, wondering what such a fine gentleman could want with her, and half afraid it was the parish beadle.

‘Are you Nelly Thomson, do you say?’ repeated the man.

‘Yes, sir,’ answered Nelly, dropping a curtsey.

‘Then keep the door open and wait a bit.’

And the man walked off.

Nelly did keep the door open, wondering what was going to happen next. She felt more inclined to run away than anything else. She had not waited long when up came a lady, leading a beautiful girl by the hand, and followed by the fine man carrying a large bundle. When Nelly ventured to raise her eyes, she found it was the very same kind lady who used to come and see her in the hospital.

‘So I’ve found you out at last, Nelly?’ said a sweet voice; ‘I daresay you thought I had forgotten all about my promise, and you would never see me again. Did you, child?’

By this time Nelly had forgotten all her fear, she was so delighted to see her kind friend again. The man put the bundle on the table and disappeared.

‘I have been away, or I should have come to see you long ago. Now sit down and tell me all about yourself, and what you have been doing,’ said the lady, as she sat down herself.

How glad Nelly felt that there was a good chair for her to sit on, and that she had cleaned the room so thoroughly that morning. By the help of a few questions she told the lady everything about her father and mother and all, and even how she was longing for a new paper.

‘Well, Nelly, I think I can help you in that,’ said the lady, whose name was Mrs. Cavendish. ‘I have brought you some needlework to do, and when you have done it I will pay you well for it if you do it neatly—my little daughter Lily is very fond of the doll you dressed for her—and then you can buy the paper with your own money; so the sooner you get the work done the sooner you will get the paper.’

Nelly was so delighted, she could hardly speak. Mrs. Cavendish showed her how the work was to

be done, and then gave her a few pictures and some old books, and went away, promising to call again before long.

Nelly really had cause to sing now. As she had quite finished all her cleaning, she began sewing at once. It was quite a rest to her to sit and sew, for going about the house so much made her poor leg ache very badly. As she sewed, she thought of all sorts of bright things for the future,—how she would buy the new paper and surprise her father, and perhaps even a bit of carpet too; and how, perhaps, before winter, she might get a new dress for her mother, and throw her old dirty one away, or, at any rate, wash it and mend it up; and then, perhaps, if her mother had a clean gown, she might like the clean room better. And then Nelly thought of another thing she might do if she learnt to work very fast—she might earn the money and let her mother stay at home and rest. If she could only do that, she would indeed be a happy girl, she thought. So she worked on with busy fingers and still busier thoughts till the church clock struck six, then she put her work neatly away on the top shelf and began to prepare tea; and the



children came running in, and there was plenty to do till they were all washed and put to bed. Then Nelly told her father that Mrs. Cavendish had been to see her, and she showed him the pictures and the books. He began reading one of the books aloud, while Nelly worked. It was a very nice book, and Mrs. Thomson and Jane began to listen too, and seemed quite to enjoy it.

Nelly said nothing about her scheme for buying a new paper. She thought she would keep that a little secret, and give them all a surprise. But as she longed to talk about it to some one, she told Annie the next day. Annie was very pleased.

‘I wonder you can keep it a secret, though,’ she said; ‘I’m sure I could not. I think I should tell Jane, and if she knew she might help you in the house, and you would have more time for sewing.’

‘So she might,’ answered Nelly. ‘I think I will tell her;’ and she did.

Jane was so pleased at having a secret with Nelly, that she promised to help her all she could, and after that the two sisters were better friends than they had ever been before.



## CHAPTER X.

### THE NEW PAPER.

**N**ELLY worked away very industriously. She never lost a minute; and now Jane helped her so much in the house, she was not nearly so tired as she used to be, when she was always on her feet. Indeed, sitting and sewing seemed quite like rest to the lame girl. This was the way they managed: the two sisters rose early, and while Nelly dressed and washed the little ones, Jane got breakfast ready and tidied the place a little before she went to school; then Nelly swept and washed up, and got dinner ready. Very often the dinner was nothing but a few baked potatoes, or even some bread and treacle; but Nelly had learnt to take quite a pride in having it always neatly put upon the table in good time for her mother and the children.

Now Jane had begun too to try to make herself useful at home. She hurried back from school, instead of idling about in the streets, as she always used to do; and she found that she had plenty of time to wash up, so that Nelly could sit down to her sewing the moment dinner was over, and have nearly the whole afternoon for her needlework, till it was time to prepare the tea. Then after tea Jane would put the children to bed, and Nelly would wash her hands and go on with her work till bed-time, and while she worked her father read aloud. The book Mrs. Cavendish had lent them was so interesting, that none of them liked to miss any of it; and so the evenings passed quickly and pleasantly away, and Nelly had quite finished her job by the time Mrs. Cavendish called again. Mrs. Cavendish had promised to come in her carriage and fetch the work herself, as she lived a long way off—much too far for a lame girl to walk.

That was a proud moment for Nelly, when the kind lady examined her work, and praised it very much, and put two bright half-crowns into her hand; besides that, she left some more work to be done, and a bundle of old clothes, which she

said Nelly might mend and alter for herself or her sisters. And then, with a few more kind words, Mrs. Cavendish went away, leaving a very happy girl behind her, besides another nice book. Directly Mrs. Cavendish was gone, Nelly went to fetch Annie, that they might look over the bundle together; and while they were in the midst of it, in came Jane. There were so many things that everyone could have something. There was even an old coat and a neck-tie for 'father;' and a gown that would do most beautifully for mother; and a pretty handkerchief to spare for Annie.

When they had at last decided what should be done with each thing, Nelly showed her two half-crowns, and the three girls began to consult as to what would be the prettiest kind of paper, and how much it would cost; but none of them knew much about it, so Annie promised to ask her father that very night.

The next day, a little before dinner-time, in came Annie and Mr. Green. He said he had come to measure the wall, and tell Nelly exactly how much paper she would want, and what it would cost. 'And if you can get away this after-

noon, I will take you to a shop where you can get it cheap, Nelly,' he said.

'How kind you are!' answered Nelly. 'But Jane must come with us, she would be so disappointed not to help to choose. Do you think there would be any harm in her stopping away from school? It is a great secret, you know.'

'No harm at all just for this once. I'm going to take a half-holiday, and I'm sure Jane may too. Throw the blame upon me.'

'And do you think we can put up the paper ourselves? It will be such a surprise to father!' asked Nelly.

'If you take my advice,' said Mr. Green, 'you'll let your father put up the paper himself. He'll take as much pride and pleasure in it again if he has a hand in it himself; and besides, you girls could not manage it alone, anyhow. I shall be at home Saturday afternoon, and I'll come in and help; the days are so long now, we shall have it all finished before night if we all work at it. So good-bye till this afternoon.'

When Jane came in from school Nelly took her very mysteriously into the yard, to tell her

the grand secret. She quite jumped with joy when she heard it, and the two sisters were quite in a fidget to get the little ones back to school. Their mother never came home till the evening now when she went to her work. After dinner, Nelly and Jane made themselves as tidy as they could, and went to Mr. Green's, where they found Annie just putting on her hat to go with them.

It was a very merry party that set off; and when they reached the shop, they were a long time before they could decide on which paper to choose.

Mr. Green and Annie liked a neat pattern, but Nelly was set upon having something with flowers in it. 'Flowers will remind mother of when she was a girl: she used to live in the country then, and I have often heard her say that the roses used to peep in at the windows; so I would like to have roses, please.'

At last they found a paper which was exactly what Nelly wanted; it was very gay-looking, and had bunches of roses all over it. Mr. Green told the shopman how much they wanted, and he tied it up in a great roll, which Mr. Green put under his arm. Nelly wanted to carry it herself, but

with her stick she found she could not manage it, for she could not walk far without a stick. Nelly paid for her paper, and found she still had eighteenpence left. She wanted to buy some white-wash with that; but Mr. Green said he would give her a pail of white-wash, and lend the brushes.

As it was still early, Mr. Green said he would like to give the children a treat; so he took them for a walk down a street full of beautiful shops, and let them look a long time at all the windows; then he gave them each a bottle of ginger-beer and a bun, and then it was quite time to turn home. Nelly asked him to take care of the paper till Saturday, for she was afraid if she took it home her secret would be discovered.

Nelly and Jane kept whispering together all the evening, and when they said good night, Nelly said to her father:

‘I want you to come home very early on Saturday, father; will you?’

‘Why, Nelly?’ asked her father.

‘Because there’s something I want you to do for me.’

‘What is it, child?’

‘Oh, it’s a secret,’ answered Nelly. ‘I can’t tell you till Saturday comes.’

‘I shall be sure to be home early, then, for I shall be so anxious to find out the secret,’ said Mr. Thomson, laughing; but Mrs. Thomson only looked cross, and said she had no patience with such nonsensical mysteries. Nelly could not think why it was that her mother never seemed pleased with anything she did or said now; it was quite a trouble to the poor girl.

At last the long looked-for Saturday came. In the morning, Mrs. Thomson said she was going to see her sister, who lived on the other side of London.

‘You can get along well enough without me, I’m sure, now Nelly has grown so wonderfully clever; and you can enjoy your precious secret all to yourselves without me to trouble you. Don’t expect me home till late.’

‘Oh, mother,’ said Nelly, feeling ready to cry, ‘do come back early; the secret is as much for you as for any one else. Indeed it is!’

‘Don’t try to humbug me,’ answered Mrs.



Thomson ; ' I can see as far through a stone wall as any one. I wish I was dead, that I do. It is hard for a poor woman when her husband and children turn against her in such a way. You all wish me out of the way, that's plain enough ; you think you'd be grand folks if only you could get rid of your poor mother. She's only a disgrace, and not fit to be seen. Oh, yes ; I know what it all means.'

' I'm surprised to hear you talk such nonsense,' said Thomson. ' I only want to see you clean and smart, like Nelly ; you know that very well.'

' Yes, like Nelly. It's always Nelly ; Nelly's everything—your wife's nothing. I'm a miserable woman, that's what I am ;' and she went out, slamming the door after her.

She did indeed look a miserable woman, as she said.

Poor Nelly began to cry.

' I can't think what makes mother so queer to me,' she said. ' Ever since I came home from the hospital she's turned against me, and I can't please her, do what I will. The more I try the worse she seems.'

‘Don’t fret yourself about it, Nelly, my girl,’ answered her father kindly; ‘it’s only her temper, so you must not mind. She always was a queer jealous temper ever since I’ve known her; it will all come right in time. Good-bye; I shall be in about two o’clock.’

But Nelly could not shake the weight off her heart that her mother’s words had left there, and the joy with which she had looked forward to this day was much dimmed. She and Jane were very busy all the morning, and twelve o’clock came almost too soon. A few minutes after the clock had struck, Mr. Green appeared, dressed in a holland blouse, and carrying a pail in one hand and a pair of steps in the other.

‘I’ve eaten my dinner and come off at once to begin the white-washing; there’s no time to be lost,’ he said.

He set to work at the dirty ceiling, and before one o’clock had made it beautifully white and clean.

‘I flatter myself there is not a nicer ceiling than that in the whole street,’ he said. ‘It does make a difference, to be sure—like washing a dirty child’s face, isn’t it?’

Nelly and Jane were loud in their praises and thanks.

‘There’s a good deal left in the pail,’ Mr. Green went on; ‘I may as well use it all up, so I’ll do the bedroom if you like, Nelly; it will make it a deal more healthy.’

So the kind man put a clean wash over both the bedroom ceilings, which wanted it badly enough. He was sorry to see how miserable the rooms were. They had no furniture at all except one tumble-down bedstead. The children all slept on the floor. Before the bedroom ceilings were finished Mr. Thomson came in. He was met at the door by Nelly, with sparkling eyes and a face all flushed with pleasure. For the time she had forgotten her mother’s unkind words.

‘Oh, father, do come in!’ she cried; ‘now I’ll tell you the secret. Just look here; isn’t it lovely? And do look at the ceiling, too!’ And she began to unroll the new paper.

‘Nelly, you *are* a clever girl, and no mistake,’ said her father. ‘You don’t mean to say you made the ceiling so beautiful and white?’

‘No; that’s what Mr. Green’s done, father;

isn't it kind of him ? He's up-stairs now, doing the bedrooms, and he says he will help us hang the paper. And I bought it all with my own money ; and I chose roses, because I thought they would remind mother of the country ; don't you think they will, father ?' Nelly spoke so eagerly that her words all came tumbling out of her mouth together, and her father was quite bewildered, and could hardly make out what she meant. In a few minutes Mr. Green came down, and he explained it all.

Mr. Thomson gave Nelly a hearty kiss, and then they all set to work to hang the paper. Mr. Green had been quite right, for Nelly found her father seemed to enjoy this part of it almost more than any of them ; and Mr. Green declared he was quite clever at it, and would make a capital paper-hanger.

By the time the sun set, the last bunch of roses was safely sticking to the wall. When they had all admired their work some time, the two men went into the yard to smoke their pipes, while the girls put the children to bed and made the room straight.

As they walked up and down the little back

yard, Green suggested to Thomson that he might turn the place into a garden, and grow a few vegetables and flowers.

‘My own bit of garden is in very good order just now,’ he said; ‘I could give you a few roots and cuttings, and I could often spare an hour of an evening to help you to dig it up and make the beds.’

Thomson thanked him for his kind offer, and said it was a very good idea. Then he went into the house and gave Nelly a shilling, and told her to go to the corner shop and get something nice for supper.

Nelly was tired enough by this time, but she gladly limped off, and returned with some fine fresh herrings, a bit of cheese, and a loaf. While she was away Jane had laid the cloth (they had a clean cloth now! thanks to Nelly’s washing), and very soon supper was ready, and a very merry party sat round the table.

‘Why, the place is a palace to what it used to be,’ cried Mr. Thomson, rubbing his hands with delight. ‘I never expected to have a room like this again; and it’s all owing to little lame Nelly.’

‘No, it isn’t, father,’ answered Nelly, blushing with pleasure. ‘It’s you more than me ; it’s because you left off going to the pub—’ here she hesitated.

‘Speak it out, lass, don’t be afraid,’ said her father. ‘Because I’ve left off going to the public-house, you were going to say ; and who have I to thank for that but you ? Yes, Nelly, girl, you saved me from that. I never could get your pale tired face out of my head for weeks and weeks after that night you came after me, and waited for me all through those hours in the cold and rain. You saved your poor father that night, Nell, and God bless you for it,’ and the rough man rubbed the tears out of his eyes, and his voice shook as he spoke. ‘If ever I’ve made a beast of myself since, your little face has come up and haunted me, just as it looked that night, till I couldn’t stand it any longer.’

Nelly fairly burst into tears, but they were very happy tears ; it seemed to her that she had earned a much greater reward than she deserved.



## CHAPTER XI.

### AN UNEXPECTED VISITOR.

**I**N the midst of the feast the door suddenly opened, and in walked Mrs. Thomson. She looked strange and haggard, and flung herself down in a chair, as though she was very tired.

‘Just in time,’ cried her husband cheerfully. ‘Come, my dear, and have some supper, and see Nelly’s grand secret.’

‘Nelly! yes, it’s always Nelly,’ she said. ‘So **this** is the way you go on when I’m away! I wish I’d staid away, that I do. Just give me a drop of beer, Jane, and I’ll go to bed, for I’m dead tired.’

‘Well, just look round the room, wife, and that will do you good,’ said her husband, as he handed her some beer.

Then, for the first time, Mrs. Thomson glanced round the room. She looked puzzled.

'This is not my home,' she said presently; 'such a fine place as this is not for poor creatures like us. What have you been doing, Thomson? Is this Mr. Green's house?'

'No; it's our house, and it's Nelly's doing—this is her secret.'

'Nelly! yes, of course it's Nelly. She's mistress now—I'm nothing. Good night; I won't disturb you any more,' and she went upstairs.

That night Mrs. Thomson was taken very ill. For weeks and weeks she lay between life and death. Now that he was afraid of losing his wife, Mr. Thomson's old love revived, and every moment he had at home he spent by her bed-side. When he was there she would 'lie quite **contentedly**, with her poor wasted hand clasped in his, but when he was away she moaned and cried nearly all the time.

Jane had to leave school to wait on her mother, who would hardly allow Nelly to come near her. Of course this made Nelly very unhappy,



but she worked away harder than ever. Jane had to be constantly in her mother's room, so everything else fell upon lame Nelly. She washed and cleaned and prepared everything her mother ate, and then sat up late at night over her sewing, that she might earn a few shillings to buy some little delicacy for the sick woman. Often she was so tired that she fell asleep over her work, and would presently wake up with a start, and find herself in the dark, and then would creep up to her bed, feeling almost too tired to undress.

Her husband, Nelly, and Jane took it in turns to sit up with Mrs. Thomson at night. These were very trying nights to Nelly; she really made her mother more comfortable than any one, and was always gentle and patient with her, but she never got a word of thanks or even a kind look in return. She did not attempt to talk to her mother, but often read a few verses from her little red Testament in a low voice, or softly sang some sweet hymn, which generally soothed the poor woman off to sleep.

Nelly often cried very bitterly because it seemed so impossible to gain her mother's love ;

and her young face grew very thin and sorrowful during these long anxious days.

At last the great danger was passed, but there were still many weeks of suffering before Mrs. Thomson. She was so weak that she could not sit up in bed, and she was as helpless as a child. As she got better, she grew very fretful and irritable, but still Nelly's gentle, loving spirit never failed her, though it was a very dreary path she had to tread at that time.

As the cold weather came on, Nelly caught cold in her lame leg, and rheumatism set in, so that she could no longer do any of the house-work, and she and Jane were obliged to change places. All day long the lame girl sat in her mother's sick-room, waiting on her and doing her needlework, for kind Mrs. Cavendish kept her well supplied.

Jane was a good, kind-hearted little girl, but her temper was hasty, and she was thoughtless; and now that Nelly had to wait on her constantly, Mrs. Thomson could not help feeling the difference, for Nelly had learnt something about nursing from Sister Agnes; but Mrs. Thomson was too proud to say anything.

One evening Mr. Thomson came in, and said a visitor was going to call.

‘I don’t want any callers here,’ said his wife. ‘You and Nelly can enjoy him together downstairs, but don’t bring him near me.’

‘Who is it?’ asked Nelly.

‘Why, Mr. Thornton. I met him in the street, and he says his tea-meetings are going to begin again, and he asked you and me to come to them, Nell.’

Nelly’s face brightened up. ‘Oh, how nice!’ she said. ‘Of course we will go, father.’ Then she checked herself—‘I mean, *you* will.’

‘And you too, child.’

‘No, I cannot leave mother; you can take Jane.’

As she was speaking, Jane came up to say that Mr. Thornton had come.

‘You had better go down to see your friend,’ said Mrs. Thomson. Nelly had taken up her work.

‘No, mother, I would rather stay with you; I must give you your supper and make you comfortable for the night.’

Her mother looked surprised, but said nothing. Nelly made the bed comfortable, gave her mother some beef-tea Mrs. Cavendish had sent, and then, as usual, read a few verses from the Testament and sang a little hymn.

She was in the middle of the hymn when her father came in, closely followed by Mr. Thornton.

‘I’ve brought this kind gentleman to tell you some of the good things he’s been telling me, wife,’ said Thomson.

Mr. Thornton went to the bed-side, and kindly asked the sick woman a few questions; then he turned to Nelly.

‘This cannot be the little girl I knew last winter?’ he said, doubtfully.

‘Yes, sir,’ answered Nelly, blushing.

‘Why, I can hardly believe it,’ he exclaimed; ‘the eyes are the same, but nothing else. You look very pale and worn, though, child; I am afraid you are over-worked.’ And he added in a lower tone, ‘Leave me with your mother now, I will talk to you presently.’

So Nelly limped down-stairs. In about half-an-hour Mr. Thornton followed. He found

Nelly alone, still at her sewing, for Jane had gone out on an errand, and the little ones were in bed.

Mr. Thornton sat down and began to talk to Nelly. First he admired the nice clean room and the cheerful paper. Thomson had told him the history of that. And then he began to talk to Nelly about herself, and gradually he got her to tell him all about her troubles. He listened very kindly, and seemed to feel very sorry for her. And she found it a great relief to tell some one, for she never liked to speak to any one at home of her greatest sorrow of all,—the want of her mother's love.

‘I have tried so hard to make her love me,’ she sobbed, ‘but it is no use. Sometimes I think I will give up trying, for nothing I can do ever pleases her.’

‘Poor child,’ said Mr. Thornton, ‘it is a bitter trial for you to bear. This is your cross, and you must try to bear it after Jesus. You know what He says : “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow me ;” and if you take it up cheerfully and

bravely, He will help you to carry it, and then it will grow lighter and lighter, and perhaps some day the cross will turn into a crown. And remember, dear child, that though you cannot please your mother, you can please your Lord; that is the only comfort I can give you. Now I think that ought to be enough—that you can please God and His dear Son. He says Himself: “Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, you have done it unto *Me*.” Is not that a happy thought?’

‘Yes,’ whispered Nelly.

‘I must say good night now, my child; but think of that, and trust *Him*, and it will all come right at last. Try to come to my tea to-morrow.’

Mr. Thornton’s words comforted Nelly wonderfully, and seemed to give her new strength. The thought that a child like herself could please the Lord Jesus was quite new to her.





## CHAPTER XII.

### NELLY'S REWARD.

**A**LL the next day Mrs. Thomson was even more irritable than usual. Nelly had fancied her lately perhaps a little kinder in her manner, but to-day everything seemed to go wrong; but Nelly thought of Mr. Thornton's words, and bore it all bravely and sweetly.

When her father came in, he told Nelly to make haste and get herself ready to go to the tea-party at Mr. Thornton's room.

'I would rather not go, father,' said Nelly.

'Not go, child! Why? I know you've been longing to go; it will do you good.'

'I would rather stay with mother to-night. You take Jane, please; she has never been. I can go another time.'

‘You must have your own way, I suppose, as you generally do, Miss Nell,’ laughed her father, and he and Jane set off.

Nelly watched them go with rather a sad face, and for a moment she felt a little sorry she had declined to go, for it was a great denial to her. Her father’s words were quite true, she had been looking forward to Mr. Thornton’s tea-parties for a long time; but she soon recovered herself, and went up-stairs and sat down to her work by her mother’s bed-side. She was asleep, and Nelly worked on for nearly an hour.

Nelly’s back ached very much, and so did her poor leg, and she felt very tired. For a minute she laid down her work and leant back in her chair to rest herself.

Mrs. Thomson was not asleep now. She was watching her daughter, and thinking.

‘What is the matter, Nell?’ she asked, in quite a gentle voice.

‘Oh, nothing, mother,’ answered Nelly cheerfully, as she took up her work again; ‘only my back aches a little.’

‘You slave too much at that needlework, child,



it quite tires me to see you for ever stitch, stitch, stitch.'

'I like it, mother,' answered Nelly.

Her mother did not know that almost every comfort she enjoyed was earned by Nelly's stitching.

'Where's Jane?' she asked; 'I hardly ever see her now.'

'She's gone out with father.'

'Where are they gone?'

'To Mr. Thornton's tea,' answered Nelly.

'Mr. Thornton asked you to go, Nelly. Why did not you go?'

'Because I would rather stay at home with you, mother,' said Nelly.

'You would rather stay at home with me, Nell? You don't mean that. You wanted to get your work done, I expect.'

'No; there is no particular hurry about the work. Mrs. Cavendish said next week would do.'

Mrs. Thomson was silent for some minutes, while she again watched her little daughter, and then she noticed for the first time how pale and

wan her little face looked, and how thin her hands were; though the weather now was quite cold, her dress, too, was very, very thin, but it was well patched, and perfectly clean.

‘Nelly,’ said her mother presently, ‘you are a good girl. I’ve had hard thoughts of you, child, but I begin to think I’ve wronged you, and that you love me after all. I’ve been trial enough to every one lately, but you are the only one who has always been kind and patient to me, and has never seemed to get tired of me. Come here and kiss me, child, and tell me you forgive me for my harsh thoughts.’

‘Forgive you! oh, mother!’ cried Nelly, as she burst into tears of joy. She could not say anything more, she felt so glad; she could only cover her mother’s hands and face with kisses, and bathe them with tears. This indeed was a return for the little act of self-denial in not going to the tea-party. The love she had been working and longing for so eagerly had come at last.

‘Come, come, child! don’t cry so,’ said her mother, gently stroking her head; ‘I seem to see it all so different now. I’ve been a wicked woman,

that I have. Try to forget it, Nell, and bear with me a little longer.'

'Don't talk so, mother,' said Nelly; 'I can't bear to hear you. Only tell me you love me just once.'

'Love you! yes, to be sure I do, and always did, but I made myself miserable and wretched about you. I nursed wicked, bad thoughts about you. I thought you had stolen every one's love away from me. First, it was the twins. Little Tommy did nothing but cry after Nelly, Nelly, when you went away, till he pined away and died. Then it was the same with Jimmy. And when you came home it was the same thing over again; you stole your father's heart, and Nelly, I *must* tell you, I began to hate you—I did really, child. God forgive me. The more you did to make the house comfortable for your father, the more I turned against you. He seemed so wrapped up in *you*, and to care less and less for *me*. I began to think he wished me dead; but my illness cured that thought, for no man could have been kinder. And now I don't know how to explain it, but last night when Mr. Thornton was talking to me.

about how Jesus loved sinners, even when they hated Him, and how they turned away again and again, but He kept on following them, till at last He *made* them love Him, it all came across me like a flash. "That's just the way I have been treating Nelly." It's been on my mind ever since, and I've tried to put it away, but it's no use, I must speak. Doesn't it say something in the Bible about "heaping coals of fire on their heads"? That's just what you've been doing to me, Nelly, and I'm melted at last!—melted at last, child.' Then the poor woman sank back, exhausted by saying so much. But Nelly felt so glad she could have shouted for joy. What were hard work and cold and hunger to her now? She felt she could have borne twice as much gladly, if this was to be her reward.

She moistened her mother's lips, and, when she revived a little, gave her her supper; and then the two sat hand in hand the rest of the evening, with their eyes and hearts full of love. The barrier between them was quite broken down, and Nelly told her mother how sad and unhappy she had been, and how she had striven and longed for this

moment, almost hopelessly at last. She could do no more work that night. She could look at her mother, and nothing else.

From that time Mrs. Thomson seemed as though she could hardly bear Nelly out of her sight ; she would let no one else do anything for her. Mr. Thomson laughed, and said it was his turn to be jealous. But she began really to grow stronger now, and on Christmas Day she was able to come down-stairs for the first time.

Mrs. Cavendish had lent her an arm-chair to sit in, and Nelly had bought a soft, warm shawl, to wrap round her, with her own money.

That was indeed a merry Christmas. For Mrs. Cavendish, besides the chair, had sent a piece of beef and a great plum-pudding, off which the children feasted to their heart's content. Mr. Thomson had taken them all to church in the morning. Nelly had stayed at home to help her mother, and had read to her then the story of the Babe of Bethlehem ; and then had dressed her, and wrapped her in the new shawl, so she was all ready to be taken down-stairs when her husband came in from church. She was too weak

to walk, so, as soon as Mr. Thomson was home, he carried her down in his strong arms, and placed her in the comfortable arm-chair. And then for the first time Mrs. Thomson looked round her, and admired the little room, with its bright paper and its clean ceiling.

'I can hardly believe yet that it is our room,' she said. 'The roses on the wall remind me of when I was a little child and lived in the sweet country. I loved roses then.'

'That's just what I wanted,' cried Nelly, gladly. 'I chose the roses because I thought they would remind you of the country.'

'Bless you, Nell,' said her mother; 'and where did this nice bit of carpet come from, and that bright table-cloth?'

'Oh, Mrs. Cavendish sent those with the chair. Somehow she found out that I wanted to buy a bit of carpet, but my money was all gone, and so she sent it. Wasn't it kind?'

'Yes, indeed,' answered Mrs. Thomson, wiping her eyes. 'All these comforts for me, and *He* was laid in a manger! It is too much, it makes me feel ashamed.'

Then the children came trooping in with clean hands and faces and smooth hair, for Jane had been making them tidy, and they all sat down to their Christmas dinner.

After dinner, when they were eating the oranges Mrs. Cavendish had sent, Mr. Thomson said :

‘And now I have some news to tell you. Last night, when I went to fetch all these good things, Mrs. Cavendish sent for me, and she told me her husband has a great deal of influence on the railway, and he had spoken for me, and got me a place as ticket-collector. What do you think of that? Won’t you be proud of your father when he wears a beautiful coat with silver buttons, eh, children?’

‘And are you really going to?’ asked Nelly.

‘Yes; I’m to begin on New Year’s Day. It’s a capital thing for me, I can tell you, for work is always certain unless I am ill; frost won’t throw me out of work now, and I’d been fretting about that terrible, lately. I thought when the frost set in, we should all have to depend upon Nelly’s needle for our living. But that is not all: Mrs.

Cavendish says that as soon as you are better, wife, and able to get about a little, she'll take our Jane and train her for a little servant ; she'll put her under her own cook, who is a capital manager. So, Jane, you must look sharp and get your things ready, for we shall soon have mother her old self again, now she's once down-stairs.'

'I shall never be my old self again,' said Mrs. Thomson. 'I'm afraid I shall always be a sad burden to you, for I don't feel as if I had any more work in me ; and I hope I shall never be the *same* old self I used to be.'

'Don't talk of burdens,' cried her husband. 'Thank God, we shall not need your work now ; and you know how glad the children are to wait on you. They ought to be, I'm sure, for you had enough waiting on them when they were little.'

'I was a bad mother to them always, I'm afraid.'

'Nonsense, wife,' said Mr. Thomson. 'Mrs. Cavendish wanted to have our Nell as a little needlewoman, but I shook my head at that ; I said we could not spare Nell anyhow.'



‘No, indeed, we could not spare Nell,’ cried they all ; and Mrs. Thomson took Nelly’s hand in hers, and said :

‘You’ll never leave your poor mother, will you, Nell?’

Nelly answered with a kiss.

After dinner, Mr. Green called in to say they had had a big cake sent them from the country, and if it would not be too much for Mrs. Thomson, he would like to come in with his wife and children and the cake, so that they might all spend the Christmas evening together.

‘Come, and welcome,’ said Mr. Thomson. So, in a few minutes, in came Mrs. Green, carrying the big cake, and Annie with a can of milk and a pot of butter, and all the other children, each with a mug and a stool, followed up by Mr. Green with his fiddle.

That was a merry Christmas, to be sure ! Mr. Green played his fiddle, and all the children sat round the fire and sang Christmas hymns and school songs.

Then, after tea, Mr. Thomson carried his wife up-stairs ; and while Nelly was helping her to

bed, the children had a romp till they were tired out, and glad to go to bed too, after they had sung one more hymn, and Mr. Thomson had read a few verses about the Child whose birthday they were keeping. Then, when the house was quiet, and Mrs. Thomson in a sweet sleep, the others sat round the fire and had a talk. They talked of the past and the future, and at last, with thankful hearts, and good wishes and resolves for the new year, they said good night; and so ended the Merry Christmas, which was soon followed by a Happy New Year.

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